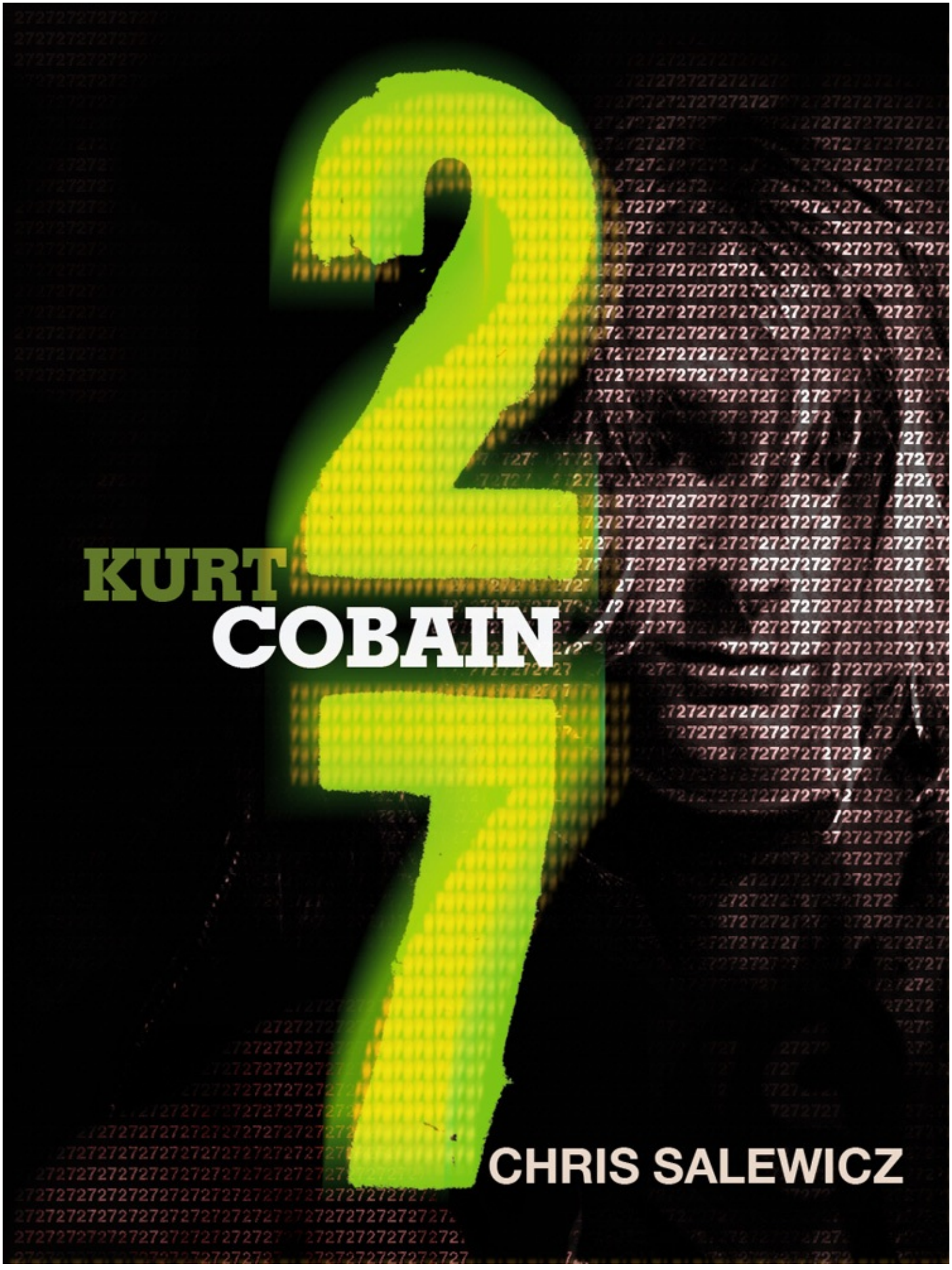

KURT
COBAIN
27
CHRIS SALEWICZ

27: Kurt Cobain

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'Now he's gone and joined that stupid club: I told him not to join that stupid club.'

And so Wendy O'Connor, the mother of Kurt Cobain, reacted to the news of her son's self-inflicted death on 8 April 1994.

By 'stupid club', O'Connor meant the phenomenon of musical stars who had passed away – as had her son – at the age of twenty-seven, as though they were unable to cross that bridge into full adulthood that lies ahead of all of us in our late twenties. Other members of Wendy O'Connor's 'club' included the Rolling Stones' Brian Jones, the Doors' Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix – like Kurt Cobain, another left-handed guitar player from America's Pacific North-West, who also revolutionized the music scene while fronting a power-trio.

Kurt Cobain was not the first male member of his family to kill himself. So matter of course was suicide on both sides of his family that, as a young teenager, Kurt would joke of having 'suicide genes'.

When the future Nirvana singer was twelve years old, Burle Cobain, his great-uncle, brother to Kurt's grandfather Leland, took a pistol and shot himself, first in the stomach and then in the head, finally killing himself. A year previously, ignoring medical advice that he would face death if he did not give up alcohol, Ernest Cobain, Leland and Burle's brother, had fallen on the stairs in his house while drunk, dying from a brain aneurysm – some form of subconscious suicide, perhaps. ('Aneurysm' would become the title of a 1991 Nirvana song, the B-side of 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'; however, there seems little link to Ernest Cobain's tragic fate – Charles R. Cross, Cobain's biographer, asserts that Kurt wrote the lyrics to 'Aneurysm' about his ex-girlfriend, musician Tobi Vail.)

On his mother Wendy's side, Kurt's great-grandfather had stabbed himself in front of the entire family. Admitted to a mental hospital, he finally killed himself two months later by tearing apart his healing wounds.

It must have seemed almost an everyday occurrence, when, as an early teenager, Kurt and a pair of friends found the hanging body of a boy who had killed himself. So, you are inclined to muse, was Kurt's end inevitable?

Surviving members of families in which suicide has occurred are frequently haunted by the fear that it runs in the family, that one day they too might take their own lives. Mental health problems run in many families, and it is worth recalling that the third single off *Nevermind* was 'Lithium', a song that took the name of the drug that allegedly 'treated' manic-depressive – bi-polar, as it became termed – behaviour. This was an affliction from which Kurt certainly suffered, though it is not known whether he ever took lithium.

Yet tragedy in the family can act as a spur for other members. Was this the case with this highly sensitive and intelligent, innately artistic boy who would utterly change the course of 1990s music?

In 1991 Nirvana revealed themselves as the last Great American Rock Band, one which emerged seemingly from nowhere to sell over 30 million copies of *Nevermind*. Nirvana are as indelibly the sound of America's West Coast as the Beach Boys, but this is a different West Coast, marinaded in rain, mist and darkness. In the vanguard of what became known as the 'grunge' movement, the sludgy fusion of punk rock and heavy metal that emerged from the Pacific Northwest, Nirvana's seemingly sudden success overturned the American music business. Until then, 'alternative' music had seemed marginal at best in its sales potential, but now it was evident that there was a critical mass of fans apparently waiting for just such an act to materialize. Nirvana shook the world with their music. Their explosive arrival opened the floodgates for acts previously marginalized as part of America's resolutely independent music scene. Several such bands became part of the most exciting movement since punk fifteen years previously, of which Nirvana were direct descendants. REM – already frontrunners – Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins,

Dinosaur Jr., Rage Against the Machine, Screaming Trees, Jane's Addiction, and – for Kurt, the spiritual godfathers – Sonic Youth, now swept all before them.

Not only was Kurt Cobain the most successful musician of his generation, he was the rock 'n' roll god of his age: a rock star, a father, an anti-style icon, a junkie, a suicide. Yet his was also the story of what happens to a man when he gets what he wants.

Kurt took the universal pain of a child of divorce and expressed it (the parents of Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic and drummer Dave Grohl had also split up). His persistent feelings of utter isolation were so archetypal that he managed to truly connect with an enormous audience. Kurt seemed an almost professional loser, which was why he became such a huge star. Everyone identified with him and his struggle to be himself. Yet there was always an element of pose, and although Kurt Cobain seemed the personification of what would soon become known as Generation X 'slacker' apathy, he was also a very good actor. He was largely content to go along with anything that could boost his success, perfectly prepared to sign with a major label, to ditch an inappropriate drummer, and to accept huge pay cheques for playing major festivals. Yet he was persistently conflicted over his role as a star, uncomfortable with the financial rewards it brought.

Nirvana were a punk act that drew on the spirit of the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks*, on the churning drive of Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, and on the melodic possibilities of the Beatles, with whose music Kurt had grown up. Many of his relatives loved the English group. 'My aunts would give me Beatles' records,' he told Jon Savage. 'For the most part it was just Beatles' records.' In fact, many of Kurt's influences were from the UK. Appropriately, at the end of 1991, when *Nevermind* was surging up the US charts, Nirvana were touring Britain and then Europe, largely unaware that their lives were about to be utterly transformed.

An anti-hero figurehead for his generation in his moth-holed thrift store woollen apparel, in January 1992 Kurt Cobain and Nirvana dislodged Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* album from its long stint at the top of the US album charts. As a cultural figure, Kurt represented a very specific moment when a unique sense of community – the global Nirvana community – emerged from popular culture. The early 1990s were a period of recession and war, both in the Gulf and the former Yugoslavia, and Kurt's hand-me-down garb was the antithesis of the designer-besotted late 1980s. His rebel music bespoke the soul of a difficult, dysfunctional individual, which was precisely the interior landscape of many of his fans.

As the Beatles had done with Liverpool, Bob Marley with Kingston, Jamaica, and Bruce Springsteen with New Jersey's Asbury Park, Nirvana put Seattle on the musical map. Seattle, which has a population of three million, has a long-standing liberal, progressive outlook, and is an affluent city. But it does not enjoy an easy climate: central to the sound of Nirvana is the mildly depressive, laconic feel of the American Pacific North-West, where rain clouds ceaselessly tumble inland from over the vast ocean and sit over the blustery city.

It was only later that it became known that Nirvana were not actually from Seattle at all. The biggest city in Washington state happened to be the one to which Kurt Cobain and bass player Krist Novoselic had eventually relocated from the logging town of Aberdeen, three hours drive to the south west. This is where they had grown up, a town with an 18,000 population that has an average rainfall of almost 100 inches. Grays Harbor County, in which the town is located, has one of the highest suicide rates in the United States. Later, Alice Wheeler, Kurt's photographer friend, would visit Kurt in Aberdeen. 'It would always be raining,' she said. 'You'd always witness some kind of domestic violence.'

*

Kurt Cobain had been born on 20 February 1967, in Aberdeen, Washington. (On that day Jimi Hendrix was in the studio in London, making one of his first recordings.) His father, Donald Cobain, was a 21-

year-old car mechanic, and his mother, pretty Wendy Fradenburg, whom he had married when she became pregnant almost as soon as she graduated from high school, was only 18. Three years later, Kurt's sister Kim was born. From the age of two, Kurt showed an interest in music. This was hardly surprising, as everyone on his mother's side of the family played one musical instrument or another. Wendy's sister Mari was a guitar-playing country musician who had actually made a record. When he was five Kurt was learning to play the drums. By the time he was seven, Mari would play him Beatles and Monkees records, and was attempting to teach her nephew the guitar.

Already it was evident that the boy was a talented artist, a gift he was encouraged to explore and express. Birthday and Christmas presents would often be gifts of new pencils or paints. For a long time he wanted to complete his education at art school. 'The plan for my life, ever since I can remember, was to be a commercial artist,' he said.[1] 'My mother gave me a lot of support in being artistic. She was really complimentary of my drawings and paintings. So I was always building up to that. By the time I was in ninth grade, I was taking three commercial art classes and I was going to art school and my art teacher would enter my paintings and stuff for contests. I wasn't interested in that at all, really. It wasn't what I wanted to do. I knew that I wasn't as good as everyone else thought I was in that town … I'm a better artist than probably everyone else in that school, but that doesn't say anything if you compare it to a larger city. I knew my limitations. I really enjoy art, I like to paint still. I've always felt the same about writing as well. I know I'm not educated enough to really write something that I would like to read.'

Kurt was one of those kids who finds security in burying himself in books. 'I went to the library a lot, and I skipped school a lot, especially during high school, and the only place to go during the day was the library. But I didn't know what to read, it was just whatever I found. During grade school I would read S.E. Hinton books [the most famous is *The Outsider*]. I really enjoyed those. I read a lot in class too, when I went to school. Just to stay away from people so I didn't have to talk to them. A lot of times I'd even just pretend to read, to stay away from people.'

As he grew older, Kurt had a group of very loyal, supportive friends in Aberdeen who held him in high regard, respecting the image of the consummate artist that he exuded. His semi-abstract paintings were strikingly interesting, sometimes fascinating, and he wrote witty, often extremely dark but very distinctive poetry, diligently logged away in sets of journals. (Later, seeking lyrics, he would often purloin them from his collection of poetry, noting those contrasting occasions when he wrote a set of lyrics specifically for the song in question.)

Kurt's entire life was overshadowed by the trauma of his parents' divorce, when he was eight. 'I had a really good childhood until my parents divorced,' Kurt said in 1993. 'I was ashamed of my parents. I couldn't face some of my friends at school. I desperately wanted to have a typical family. I wanted that security. All of a sudden my whole world changed and I became anti-social. I also started to understand the reality of my surroundings. Which didn't have a lot to offer.'[2]

'He changed completely,' Wendy, his mother, told Michael Azerrad, remembering the divorce. 'I think he was ashamed. And he became very inward – he just held everything. He became real shy. He became real sullen, kind of mad and always frowning and ridiculing.'

Ignoring the friends and family members who appreciated his evident talent, Kurt began to believe he was increasingly friendless, an outsider. By the time he was coming into his teens, Kurt said, 'I started to realize that I was more interested in drawing and listening to music, more so than the other kids. It just slowly grew on me and I started to realize that. So that by the time I was twelve I was fully withdrawn.'[3]

Diagnosed as hyper-active, and allegedly suffering from attention deficit disorder – which, in Kurt's case, probably only meant a restlessly inquisitive mind – he was prescribed Ritalin. This amphetamine-like drug would prevent him sleeping at night, and consequently, he was also put on downers. Eventually, sugar and red dye no. 2 were removed from his diet, and Kurt was taken off the pharmaceuticals.

When Bev Cobain, Kurt's cousin, a registered nurse with a background in mental health, was later asked if Kurt had mental health problems other than general depression, her reply was illuminating: 'Kurt was diagnosed at a young age with attention deficit disorder [ADD], then later with bipolar disorder [also known as manic depression]. Bipolar illness has the same characteristics as major clinical depression, but with mood swings, which present as rage, euphoria, high energy, irritability, distractibility, overconfidence, and other symptoms. As Kurt undoubtedly knew, bipolar illness can be very difficult to manage, and the correct diagnosis is crucial. Unfortunately for Kurt, compliance with the appropriate treatment is also a critical factor.'

'Kurt was an unstable person even before he got into the music business,' said his aunt Mary. 'There was a song he wrote when he was 17, called "Sea Suicide".'

Unable to coexist with his mother's new boyfriend, who reportedly was later diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, Kurt went to live with his father, Don. Don had given up his job of car mechanic and become a logger, moving into a prefabricated home in tiny Montesano, a town with a population of under 4,000, twenty miles from Aberdeen. Soon he and Kurt moved into a proper house in Montesano. Also living with them were Don's new wife and her two children, an arrangement that caused Kurt further unhappiness. Hunting in the local forests was part of everyday life in Montesano, but when his father took him on a hunting expedition, Kurt refused to climb down from the truck to take part. 'Now that I look back on it,' Kurt remembered, 'I know I had the sense that killing animals is wrong, especially for sport. I didn't understand that at the time. I just knew that I didn't want to be there.'[4]

Don Cobain did have a considerable record collection, however. Kurt began to hang out with a group of slightly older boys who were into music and smoking pot. When they came over to the Cobain home, they discovered Don's records, which included Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Aerosmith and Kiss. Listening to these albums, Kurt's head was opened up to further musical possibilities, possibly assisted by the marijuana he began smoking with his new friends. 'I started turning into a little stoner kid,' he said. [5]

It hardly seems surprising that, in the manner of some lonely children, Kurt Cobain created an imaginary friend, significantly named 'Boddah', as though Kurt was searching for a guide to provide him with peace of mind.

When he was in junior high school, Kurt, encouraged by his father, reluctantly joined the wrestling team. In wrestling matches he would release some of his growing anger. 'I was a scapegoat, but not in the sense that people would pick on me all the time. People wouldn't pick on me or beat me up, because I was so withdrawn by that time, and I was so antisocial that I was almost insane. I felt so different and so crazy that people left me alone. I always felt they would vote me most likely to kill everyone at a high school dance,' Kurt said. 'I've got to that point where I've fantasized about it. But I would have opted for killing myself.'[6]

When he was turning twelve, already inspired by watching the B-52s on *Saturday Night Live*, Kurt read an article in *Creem* magazine about the Sex Pistols tour of the United States, something of an epiphany for him – it was the idea of the group that appealed to him, some time before he actually got to hear them. Searching in his local library for punk records, he discovered the Clash's *Sandinista!*, which didn't live up to what he was expecting. Although he came to like that group's *Combat Rock* album, when he finally heard *Never Mind the Bollocks*, he fell in love with it. On assorted Nirvana tunes, such as 'Territorial Pissings', you can hear that this is a vocalist who has assiduously studied the work of John 'Johnny Rotten' Lydon. The instrumental introduction to 'In Bloom' could be from a Pistols' out-take.

'The Pistols' album has the best production of any rock record I've ever heard,' was Kurt's assessment. 'It's totally in-your-face and compressed. All the hype the Sex Pistols had was totally deserved – they deserved everything they got. Johnny Rotten was the one I identified with, he was the sensitive one. The only reason I might agree with people calling our band "The Sex Pistols of the 90s" is

that, for both bands, the music is a very natural thing, very sincere.'

For a fourteenth birthday gift, not long after Kurt had been diagnosed as suffering from a minor case of scoliosis (curvature of the spine), Kurt's uncle Chuck gave him the choice of a bicycle or an electric guitar. Kurt had still been playing around with a drum kit, but now he swapped instruments. He opted for the guitar, a cheap secondhand model, and was given some tuition from one of Chuck's bandmates, learning to play AC/DC's 'Back in Black'. Other songs he learned included the Cars' 'My Best Friend's Girl', Queen's 'Another One Bites the Dust', and that staple of the region, 'Louie, Louie'. From that point on, he began to write his own songs, 'really raunchy riff-rock,' as he described them. 'I would try to play as nasty as I could … It was definitely a good release. I thought of it as a job. It was my mission. I knew I had to practice. I had this feeling all the time – I always knew I was doing something that was special.'[7] (Unbeknownst to Kurt, the weight of playing the guitar would exacerbate the curvature of his spine. 'I had minor scoliosis in Junior High, and I've been playing guitar ever since, and the weight of the guitar has made my back grow in this curvature. So when I stand, everything is sideways.')

At his father's insistence, Kurt had played in a local baseball league – as unwilling as he had been about wrestling. Another member of the team was a boy called Matt Lukin. It turned out that Lukin, like Kurt a student at Montesano High, was also a prospective musician, playing bass in a local group called the Melvins.

Kurt went to a Melvins rehearsal, and got drunk. But he also experienced an epiphany: *these guys had actually managed to put a band together …*

Having started out as Who copyists, the Melvins by now were playing furiously paced hardcore punk, sometimes performing shows as far afield as Seattle. When other groups began to play in a similar style, the Melvins altered utterly, playing everything at an impossibly slow, doomy pace, into which – sacrilege! – they began to inject elements of heavy metal. The Melvins thereby became the forerunners of what transmogrified into grunge, exemplified on their *Gluey Porch Treatments album*, released in 1987, often cited as the first grunge album.

As fate would have it, it transpired that Buzz Osbourne, the leader of the Melvins, was in the same art class as Kurt at Montesano High School – although he was a couple of years older. Osbourne owned a book about the Sex Pistols, which Kurt avidly devoured, inking the group's distinctive logo onto desks and exercise books. Kurt Cobain had decided that somehow he would start a punk group.

Finding it difficult to get on with his father's new family, Kurt moved back to Aberdeen to live with his uncle Chuck: his mother had broken up with the boyfriend and had also lost her job, so she asked Chuck to care for her son. Kurt shuffled between relatives, including his father's parents and three different sets of aunts and uncles, moving back and forth between Aberdeen and Montesano, regularly swapping high schools. How, you cannot help wondering, would this have exacerbated Kurt's mounting sense of insecurity and anger?

In 1983 Kurt moved back to his mother's place. Yet returning to his maternal home was not an easy experience. There were always guns around. In 1984, his mother suspected that Pat O'Connor, her new longshoreman husband, had cheated on her. Wendy came home drunk and grabbed one of Pat's several guns, intending to shoot him[8]. Fortuitously, she found herself unable to load the weapon. In the end, Wendy collected all Pat's rifles and pistols, took them down to Aberdeen's Wishkah River, and threw them in. Kurt watched as his mother did this. The next day he fished out of the water as many of the weapons as he could, and – in what could be seen as a symbolic twist – purchased his first professional amplifier with the proceeds from selling the guns.[9]

At Aberdeen High School, Kurt met a boy called Krist Novoselic. Blessed with a satirical mind-set, Krist was extremely funny. Sometimes Kurt felt he was the only person who appreciated his uncompromising sense of humour. In Aberdeen, Krist was known as Chris, but in 1992 he legally changed it back to his Croatian name. Krist had been born to Croatian immigrant parents on 16 May 1965, in

Compton, the sometimes notorious south-central district of Los Angeles, where from an early age being streetwise was a necessity for survival. In 1979, Krist's father, who had been driving a delivery truck in Southern California, learned that there was cheap property to be had in Aberdeen, Washington, where there was a significant Croatian community, as well as regular work in the local lumber mills. When they moved to Aberdeen, Krist Novoselic, by now a relatively sophisticated Los Angeleno, could not find any local kids with whom to empathize. Among other things, he was physically huge, eventually growing to 6' 7". The local teenagers were into Top 40 radio, while Krist dug Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Devo.

By late spring 1980, his parents had made a radical decision to send their eldest son for a stay in their homeland, which was still a region of communist Yugoslavia. Becoming fluent in Croatian while there, Krist benefited from the excellent standard of education enjoyed in the communist bloc. He also discovered the Sex Pistols and the Ramones. Their music was released in Yugoslavia, which also had a strong national music scene, as Krist discovered.

But when he returned to Aberdeen, he found his parents had divorced. He also learned that the city's isolation meant he was almost alone in his understanding of punk. 'It was hard for punk to make its way to Aberdeen because of its geographic isolation,' he told Everett True. To earn money Krist took a job at Taco Bell, saving for a vehicle and musical instruments and equipment.

Kurt Cobain, who by now would always wear a grey trench coat, first became friends with Krist's younger brother Robert. The first time he visited their home, Krist was upstairs, playing punk music. Although he was a couple of years older than Kurt, the younger boy quickly registered his presence and immediately 'got' him. Krist was, Kurt said, a 'really clever, funny, loudmouth person everyone laughed at, even though he was smarter than them.'[10]

Yet they did not immediately become close friends. In fact, as always seemed to be the case, there was hardly anyone at Aberdeen High with whom Kurt felt he could empathize. Eventually, he began to hang out with the school's stoners, who were at least into rock'n'roll. Among them was a kid called Dale Crover. Crover had just become the new drummer with the Melvins, who began to rehearse at Crover's parents' Aberdeen house. Kurt Cobain again found himself in the inner orbit of the Melvins, for whom he even auditioned at one point. 'I totally botched it. I was so nervous that I forgot all the songs. I literally couldn't play a note. I just stood there with my guitar and played feedback with a blushed face.'[11] Yet the Melvins' discipline and belief in rigorous hard work hit a nerve in Kurt, who vowed to himself to emulate them.

Kurt and Krist Novoselic would run into each other at Melvins' rehearsals. Kurt discovered that Krist played guitar, and they would hang out and play music together.

On a punk rock compilation tape that Buzz Osbourne had put together for him, Kurt discovered Black Flag, and its iconic singer Henry Rollins. Suitably inspired, in August 1984 he sold his record collection to pay for a trip to Seattle to see Black Flag. 'Becoming a punk rocker fed into my low self-esteem because it helped me realize that I don't need to become a rock star – I don't want to become a rock star … I'm so glad that I got into punk rock at the time I did because it gave me these few years that I needed to grow up and put my values in perspective and realize what kind of person I am.'[12]

In 1993, Kurt Cobain expanded on this theme: '[Buzz] made me a couple of compilation tapes, Black Flag and Flipper, everything, all the most popular punk rock bands, and I was completely blown away. I finally found my calling. That very same day, I cut my hair, and I would lip-synch to those tapes. I'd play them every day. I'd already been playing guitar by then for a couple of years, and I was trying to play my own style of punk rock, what I thought it would be. I knew it was fast, and had a lot of distortion. It expressed the way I felt politically and socially. It was the anger that I felt, the alienation.'[13]

Although he had got into more conventional rock acts, like Led Zeppelin and Aerosmith, sensitive Kurt could detect that something was awry in their entire stance. 'I really did enjoy and do enjoy some of the melodies they'd written, but they were definitely lacking something, and it took me so many years to

realize that a lot of it had to do with sexism, the way that they just wrote about their dicks, having sex. That stuff bored me,' he told Jon Savage.

Surprised at such a perception, Savage asked Kurt for the origins of such thinking – did it evolve from punk rock? No, he replied, his innate sense of injustice had been sparked earlier. 'It was before that. Because I couldn't ever find any good male friends, I ended up hanging out with the girls a lot, and I just felt that they weren't treated equally, weren't treated with respect, the way Aberdeen treated women in general. They were just totally oppressed, the words "bitch" and "cunt" would be totally common. But it took me many years after the fact to realize those were the things that were bothering me. I was just starting to understand what was pissing me off so much, and within that year, the last couple of years of high school, and punk rock, it all came together. I finally admitted to myself, I am not retarded.'

From around the time he turned fourteen, Kurt was smoking marijuana every day. By the time he was in his senior year, he started to ease off and ultimately quit altogether for a time, aware that the drug exacerbated the paranoia to which he was already prone. He also became a pot-smoking buddy of a kid called Myer Loftin, drawn to him because he was into similar music. What Kurt did not know at first was that Loftin was gay, which led to other students at Aberdeen High assuming that Kurt was also. Although this was not the case, he would be bullied – taking a couple of beatings – for this. 'I even thought that I was gay. I thought that might be the solution to my problem. One time during my school years, although I never experimented with it, I had a gay friend, and that was the only time that I ever experienced real confrontation from people, because for so many years … they were basically afraid of me, and when I started hanging out with this person who was known to be gay, I started getting a lot of shit. People trying to beat me up and stuff. Then my mother wouldn't allow me to be friends with him anymore. 'Cos she's homophobic. It was real devastating, because finally I'd found a male friend who I actually hugged and was affectionate to, and we talked about a lot of things. Around that same time, I was putting all the pieces of the puzzle together. He played a big role in that.'[14]

Ultimately, this led to Kurt having an especially sophisticated view of sexuality. In his Nirvana lyrics, Kurt would often say the unsayable: 'Everyone is gay!' he declared, on 'All Apologies' – a song that also contains the lines, 'Everything is my fault / I'll take all the blame.'

Once again, Don Cobain decided to intervene in his son's life, and try to put it back on course. Kurt was persuaded to move back to Montesano, where his father cajoled him into sitting an entrance exam to serve in the US navy. Kurt passed the test with flying colours, but refused to sign up to be a sailor.

Returning to Aberdeen, Kurt moved in with Jesse Reed and his family. Jesse was a friend whose born-again Christian parents endeavoured to set him on what they considered to be the correct path in life. Jesse's father, Dave, had an unconventional past as sax player in the Beachcombers, a 1960s garage group. Although he would be obliged to attend church with Jesse's parents, they provided a stable home life for Kurt. At the age of seventeen, under the Reeds' influence, Kurt was baptized. For a few weeks he declared he was a Christian. Kurt was looking for something. Something he never really found. But at least he felt a little more self-confident. In August 1984, Kurt had sex for the first time.[15]

On his eighteenth birthday, on 20 February 1985, the Reeds threw a party for him at their house. As a present, his aunt Mari gave him Stephen Davis's *Hammer of the Gods*, a revelatory, warts-and-all Led Zeppelin biography. Kurt was touched. '… it was nice to know people care about ya,' he wrote to her in his thank you letter.

By now Kurt's life mainly consisted of smoking large amounts of marijuana. Three months later, realizing that he was way behind on graduation credits, Kurt dropped out of high school, only weeks before he was due to have graduated. Somehow, he had decided, he would make his future in music. A high school dropout? You can't get lower than that in America. Considering his low self-esteem, such loser status may well have appealed to Kurt.

Despite the Reeds' generosity towards him, something of the feral seemed to have developed in

Kurt. On one occasion when he forgot his key, he smashed a window to get back into their house. And was summarily told to leave.

Kurt briefly moved back to his mother's. After Wendy had told him that if he didn't get a job, he would have to move out, Kurt moved into an apartment with Jesse Reed. Ironically, in order to pay for this, he did get a job, working at a restaurant on the coast, then returning to Aberdeen High – as a janitor. Going back to his high school in such a lowly role sapped him psychologically, and after two months he quit.

He then turned on Jesse. After defacing Jesse's high school yearbook – a rebuke to Jesse for having graduated? – Kurt kicked him out of the apartment, which they had shared for three months. Kurt hung on to the place. Eventually, he ran out of money and, in autumn 1985, was obliged to up sticks. Broke and homeless, Kurt slept wherever he could: in the local library; on his mother's porch. Although there is an element of self-mythologizing here, it's true that he very occasionally slept under the North Aberdeen Bridge, near his mother's place. The bridge crossed the Wishkah river, and Kurt prided himself on his ability to catch fish from its waters, which he would then eat. (Later he was told that the Wishkah was so polluted that any fish caught in it were certainly poisonous.)

That winter of 1985, Kurt put together his first group, to which he gave the cartoon-like hardcore name of Fecal Matter. Playing his own material, Fecal Matter also consisted of his friend Dale Grover on bass and another boy, Greg Hokanson, on drums. On one occasion they managed to secure a support slot with the Melvins, playing a Washington state coastal town. But Kurt and Dale Grover could not get on with the drummer, and decided to concentrate on recording together. Driving up to Seattle, they paid a visit to Kurt's aunt Mari, who owned a four-track TEAC tape recorder. Mari was amazed at how angry Kurt's vocals were, on tunes with such titles as 'Bambi Slaughter', 'Laminated Effect', 'Sound of Dentage' and 'Downer', a different version of which would appear on *Bleach*, the first Nirvana album. The sound of these tunes was like a cross between the Melvins and Metallica, reliant on heavy riffing and largely devoid of melody.

Later, with Buzz Osbourne on bass and Mike Dillard, once of the Melvins, on drums, Kurt practiced the Fecal Matter material, but eventually this project evaporated.

For around eight months, Kurt moved into the home of his friend Steve Shillinger. Shillinger's father taught English at Aberdeen High, and taking in waifs and strays was commonplace for the family. However none had ever stayed as long as Kurt did, who kept his sleeping bag behind the couch on which he slept. During this time, Kurt Cobain embarked on a side career as a graffiti artist. Largely this consisted of absurdist gestures, such as spray-painting 'QUEER' on trucks bristling with rifle-racks. Once he was picked up by the police and fined for such behaviour. (In his pocket when he was busted was a copy of a cassette by hardcore outfit Millions of Dead Cops.)

In 1986 Kurt managed to play his first live show, in a performance space in the state capital Olympia, fifty miles east of Aberdeen. Buzz Osbourne was on bass, and Dale Crover played parts of a drum kit, as Kurt recited some of his poetry over their instrumental backing – he had had to get drunk to do so. But local groovers Dylan Carlson and Slim Moon were impressed, telling Kurt afterwards how great the show had been. Kurt also started to hang out with a local drug dealer, and in the middle of the summer, this character shot Kurt up with heroin. This was the first time he had ever experienced the drug. 'It was such a scarce thing to find heroin in Aberdeen that I just thought I would try it,' he said.[16]

As her son was still essentially homeless, his mother put down the initial $200 deposit on a rundown wooden house at 1000 East Second Street in Aberdeen, near to where she lived. Melvins' bassist Matt Lukin moved in with him – useful, as Lukin was a carpenter, and plenty of work needed to be done on the two-bedroom property. Not that Lukin's efforts were always noticed. By the time that Kurt had been living there for only the briefest time, the place looked like a parody of a teenage apartment – the floor was littered with empty beer cans and it stank. In the bath Kurt installed a family of turtles, raising the question

as to where he actually washed.

Despite having taken a job as a janitor at a resort hotel – he spent most of his time sleeping in the rooms – Kurt was still always broke. By now a seasoned drug user, he needed to find a cheap high, and soon discovered the opiate properties of assorted cough syrups.

That winter, however, Kurt badly burned his left hand. He had been cooking French fries and managed to cover his hand in boiling fat. At first he was told he would never be able to play the guitar again. While he recuperated he was unable to work, which meant he had even less money than previously. Rice was almost all he could afford to eat. Yet he was able to play guitar, and spent most of the several months of his recovery improving his skills on the instrument.

During this time, for about a month, Kurt also began to rehearse with Krist Novoselic, playing with a local drummer called Bob McFadden. Together they would travel to Olympia, which lay on the Puget Sound waterfront and was respected as a regional centre for the arts. There, Kurt had discovered another musical scene altogether, one of a relative sophistication that was largely drug-free. Its focus was K Records, an indie label. K was also a local distribution network for British indie acts such as the Vaselines, Young Marble Giants and Kleenex. K was run by Candace Peterson and Calvin Johnson. Johnson's band Beat Happening were the kings of this self-consciously naïf scene, which prided itself on its geeky, nerdy nature, in which everyone – unlike Kurt with his long blond tresses – had short hair. Free-thinking and bohemian, everyone around this scene played in each other's groups. Kurt was very taken with the notion of K Records, and had its logo tattooed on his left arm. 'K Records and that whole scene in Olympia turned me on to so much amazing music. The Pastels and the Vaselines and all that stuff. Every couple of years I feel that I've gone as far as I can with being introduced to something new, and then something like that hits me and it gives me life for a few years … I was turned on to the whole 4AD thing, the Raincoats and the Young Marble Giants. It was like the first time that I heard punk rock, 'cos there were all these bands from the last fifteen years, and I'd try to find all these records, and it was a whole scene, these bands that had been going on for like ten years, and it had the same impact on me. It was a completely different world.'[17]

The K scene was extremely purist, and Calvin Johnson's first name led to Kurt dubbing its devotees as 'Calvinists'. The overriding attitude was not dissimilar to that at, say, the UK's *Sniffin' Glue* fanzine which, in 1977, had railed against the Clash for signing to a major label. While on one hand Kurt was extremely taken with such a stance, it was also incompatible with his secret ambitions, a source of extreme inner conflict in the coming years.

Meanwhile Krist Novoselic had bought a VW van with his Taco Bell earnings and become the driver for the Melvins. He also became involved with a Melvins side project, the Meltors, who would play Melvins covers. Krist became the Meltors' bass player. Some outsiders, like Slim Moon, the founder of the Kill Rock Stars label, thought him to be the coolest member of the Melvins scene. But others noted how much he drank, and his confrontational tendencies. Unlike most of his young male contemporaries in Aberdeen, however, Krist had a girlfriend, Shelli.

In his autobiography, Krist Novoselic wrote about his initial impressions of Kurt: 'Kurt was a completely creative persona – a true artist. When I first met him, he had just got a job and found his own place. What a den of art/insanity that was. He tried to make his own lava lamp out of wax and vegetable oil (it didn't work). He sketched very obscene Scooby Doo cartoons all over his apartment building hallways. He made wild sound montages from obscure records. He sculpted clay into scary spirit people writhing in agony. He played guitar, and wrote great tunes that were kind of off-kilter. Kurt held a sceptical perspective towards the world. He'd create video montages that were scathing testimonies about popular culture, compiled from hours and hours of watching TV.'[18] A longstanding problem for Kurt, however, was the fact that Krist's mother never cared for him.

For his part, meeting Krist made a considerable difference to Kurt's life: 'I hated everybody. I

always managed to have at least one close friend at a time, through most of my life. There have been years where I would just put up with my best friend, and not really like the person. But since I've been in the band and since I've known Krist … I have a handful of friends that are great …'[19]

In 1987, a year after Kurt had given Krist the Fecal Matter cassette, they formed a group, with Krist on bass and Dale Crover on drums, which they called Skid Row. 'Their songs were basically riffs,' Slim Moon said. 'They'd play a riff for a long time and Kurt would scream into the microphone, then he'd drop the guitar and play with the digital delay and make crazy noises instead of a guitar solo, and then he'd pick the guitar back up and play the riff some more. Right away, he was a showman.'[20]

Soon, after Kurt had watched a television show about Buddhism, Skid Row's name was changed to Nirvana. 'It means attainment of perfection,' explained Kurt.[21]

Part of the Olympia K Records scene was a girl called Tracy Marander, arty-looking and unusual with her vivid red hair. When she and Kurt first met, she was living in Tacoma, outside Seattle. Even though she was slightly larger than him, Kurt went for this stylish, exotic girl, and she became his first girlfriend. In the autumn of 1987, Tracy relocated from Tacoma to Olympia, renting an apartment at 114 ½ North Pear Street. Kurt, now in his twentieth year, moved up to live with her, along with a rabbit he kept in a cage on top of the fridge. After he had painted the bathroom bright red, Kurt spray-painted the words 'RED RUM' – an allusion to the horror film *The Shining* – on a wall. Living-room walls were covered with pictures and articles taken from the pages of *Melody Maker* and *NME*, which he would buy on import. Despite his evident eccentricities, people in Olympia's first impressions of Kurt were that he was a sweet guy.

Historically, the Pacific Northwest has leant towards the political left. As state capital, stylish Olympia was endowed with myriad cultural facilities for its citizens. This included KAOS radio, which was reputed to have the most comprehensive library of independent music of any station in the USA. Any record on an independent label was guaranteed to be played on KAOS, part of some unwritten charter of the station. (Even in the very early days of Nirvana, the group were regularly playing or being interviewed on KAOS: April 1987 was the month of their first broadcast, when they played eleven songs during an early-hours show.) Unusually, there was also an ethos in the city of paying serious respect to women musicians, a stance echoed by K Records. Amongst those so honoured were such British female acts as the Slits, the Raincoats and the Marine Girls. After having hung out with Myer Loftin and gained an understanding of a gay frame of mind, Kurt Cobain's sensibility was again widened, as he came to appreciate not only a feminine but also a feminist point of view. The extent to which Olympia was both hardcore and 'Calvinist', simultaneously liberating and trammelling, and how precisely this came to define a part of Kurt Cobain, should not be underestimated.

Krist Novoselic and his girlfriend Shelli also moved up to Olympia, Krist taking a job as an industrial painter at the Boeing aircraft factory. Later they would shift residences to Tacoma. Briefly Kurt and Krist formed a group covering Creedence Clearwater Revival tunes called the Sellouts, but after a few attempts to play taverns, they abandoned the project. Later, there were those who were reminded of Creedence's John Fogerty when they heard or saw Kurt sing.[22]

In the winter of 1987, the pair started playing with another drummer, Aaron Burckhard, an Aberdeen local who worked at Burger King and hung around with the Melvins. Aaron was more into conventional heavy metal, and he had a moustache, an aesthetic issue for Kurt and Krist (and, indeed, for the owners of the record label to which they would soon sign). Rehearsing at his house, Kurt applied himself with assiduous effort. 'We would play the set and then I would just start playing those songs again right away,' he said.[23] He had made a decision to get a record out as soon as possible.

Kurt was very influenced by Big Black, Killdozer, Scratch Acid and Sonic Youth – groups that he was really into and had read about in the Massachussetts-based *Forced Exposure* fanzine. He was also getting into the Sonics, the original early 1960s garage band from Tacoma: 'The Sonics recorded very,

very cheaply on a two track you know, and they just used one microphone over the drums, and they got the most amazing drum sound I've ever heard,' Kurt told an interviewer on CITR-FM. 'It's still my favourite drum sound. It sounds like he's hitting harder than anyone I've ever known.'

In the Tacoma of 1987, the atmospheric Community World Theater, a former porn cinema, became an important venue, where most acts played for nothing. The early Nirvana frequently appeared there. When the Sub Pop scene hit, as it did imminently, Tacoma was a big part of that phenomenon, largely because of the venue.

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In an unfashionable part of Seattle was located Reciprocal Studios, the base of a producer called Jack Endino. His ramshackle premises were hardly state of the art. But it was there that Endino had produced a number of revered local acts: Mother Love Bone, Mudhoney, Soundgarden. Jack Endino was the producer Nirvana wanted to work with.

On 23 January 1988 Nirvana drove down to the Seattle studio. In six hours, for $152.44, they put down and mixed ten complete songs: 'If You Must', 'Downer', 'Floyd the Barber', 'Paper Cuts', 'Spank Thru', 'Hairspray Queen', 'Aero Zeppelin', 'Beeswax', 'Mexican Seafood' and 'Pen Cap Chew'. For the session they had reverted to using Dale Crover on drums. That night Nirvana had a show at the Community World Theater, where they played the songs in the order they had been recorded. As soon as the concert ended, Dale Crover hit the road to San Francisco for dates playing with Buzz Osbourne in a reformed Melvins. Before he left, he recommended an Aberdeen drummer, Dave Foster. But after Foster was arrested for beating up someone who had been hitting on his girlfriend, his driving licence was revoked[24]. As he could no longer drive to rehearsals, Kurt and Krist worked briefly again with Aaron Burckhard. But he was held overnight for drunk-driving and for abusing the arresting officer, who happened to be black[25]. When let out of jail the next day, he said he was too hungover to come to rehearsals. Accordingly he was also out of the group.

The band found yet another drummer, Chad Channing, born on 31 January 1967. While Kurt and Krist were spending a brief spell under the name of Bliss, they played with Chad's group, Tick-Dolly-Row. The two Aberdeen boys were impressed by Chad's fibreglass drum kit, but they didn't really communicate. Eventually they were introduced at the farewell show of a group called Malfunkshun at the Community World Theater. Unenthusiastic at first, Chad soon succumbed, going over and jamming with the pair at Krist's home, where he and Kurt had constructed a rehearsal studio. Chad and Kurt were not dissimilar: softly spoken, creative, very sensitive. Like the other two members of Nirvana, Chad was the product of a divorce.

On 24 April 1988, they played their first concert together, at Seattle's Vogue. A review of the group, the first ever published, in *Backlash*, a Seattle music free-sheet, concluded with a radical prediction: 'with enough practice, Nirvana could become … better than the Melvins!'

Seattle was beginning to reveal that it had a very specific scene of its own. As Olympia had hinged around K Records, so Seattle's burgeoning musical movement was largely underpinned by the Sub Pop label. Sub Pop sprang out of a fanzine, *Subterranean Pop*, which Bruce Pavitt, then living in Olympia, had started in the early 1980s in order to pick up additional graduation credits. Moving to Seattle, he would put out cassettes with the magazine, working with Jonathan Poneman, who became his business partner. In 1986, Sub Pop put out its first album, a compilation that included Sonic Youth, Scratch Acid, Wipers and Naked Raygun. 'Sub Pop was cultivating a certain vibe, à la Blue Note or Factory,' Bruce Pavitt said.[26]

Part of that 'vibe' was the release of original-sounding singles, for which the Sub Pop pair had spotted the worth of Nirvana. So it was that on 11 June 1988, Nirvana recorded 'Love Buzz', their first

single, a cover, written and originally recorded by the Dutch group Shocking Blue in 1969. Sub Pop had suggested they record this song, their favourite from the live set. Produced by Jack Endino, the B-side was entitled 'Big Cheese', an original credited to Kurt and Krist that would also appear on their first album.

In November 1988 Sub Pop released 'Love Buzz' as the first single in the Sub Pop Singles Club, a subscription service by which subscribers received new releases by mail every month. Realizing that exposure through the American media was almost impossible, its owners took the same route as another son of Seattle, Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix had moved to Britain to break the charts, then emulated this success in the USA. As the UK music press was available widely in America on import, Bruce Pavitt and Jonathan Poneman concentrated on promoting Sub Pop through the British papers. In February 1989 they paid for *Melody Maker* journalist Everett True to fly out to Seattle and document the scene in a series of articles. When True arrived, Kurt Cobain defined the sound of the city to him: 'Hard music played to a slow tempo.' Yet Nirvana were by no means at the forefront of this new Seattle scene. It was significant that their 'Love Buzz' single was restricted to the Sub Pop Singles Club, meaning the record never had a true release of its own. This distressed Kurt, and also reflected the fact that most locals were underwhelmed by Nirvana.

Prior to the show at the Vogue that secured them their deal, Kurt Cobain had suffered from stomach ache and vomited. Simple nerves, perhaps, as suffered by many performers and sportsmen. Except that from then on the stomach pains never really went away, and Kurt was obliged to adapt his life to cope with this constant torment.

But the source of his stomach ache was more than nervousness, and it intersected with the very source of his art. Because Kurt was so sensitive and so intelligent, and could feel and perceive so much, he was extremely hurt and frustrated that everyone else didn't see and sense what he glimpsed. Stomach pain also ran in the family. 'It's a psychosomatic thing. My mom had it for a few years in her early twenties, and eventually it went away. She was in a hospital all the time because of it.'[27]

He would spend the next years of his life in thrall to this debilitating illness, enduring numerous hospital visits and doctors' examinations, all to no avail. Later, in 1993, he would explain: 'Most of the time I sing right from my stomach. Right from where my stomach pain is. That's where the pain and anger comes from. It's definitely there: every time I've had an endoscope, they find a red irritation in my stomach. But it's psychosomatic, it's all from anger. And screaming.' The pain in Kurt's belly was now added to another constant hurt: the backache he suffered from his scoliosis, exacerbated by his guitar playing. 'That really adds to the pain in our music. It really does. I'm kind of grateful for it.'[28]

In September 1988 Krist temporarily broke up with Shelli. Krist no longer had regular work, while Shelli had a night-time job. Although Krist was obliged to move back to Aberdeen, to stay with his mother for a time, he was now able to play music full time, and Nirvana could practice above his mother Maria's hairdressing shop. Yet the split put pressures on Kurt and Tracy, especially from Tracy's end, as she certainly did not want to split up with Kurt. As a salve to his girl, and after listening to the Beatles' *Meet the Beatles* album for hours, Kurt wrote her a song, 'About a Girl'.

Now there were more live performances, all over Washington State. Kurt became legendary for his readiness to smash up his equipment at the end of shows. On 30 October 1988, at a show at a dorm in Evergreen State College, Kurt smashed up a guitar for the first time. And on this first significant tour, they would pick up cheap guitars from pawnshops to be destroyed onstage that night. Similarly, Kurt would seek out effects pedals wherever they travelled. But onstage it was often Krist Novoselic who stood out more than the guitarist. 'Kurt is a really good songwriter, but to the extent that those songs became full and alive, that was Krist,' said Jonathan Poneman.[29] Others also noted that Krist was far more confident and at ease with himself than Kurt, rather more in charge. Yet Kurt had an intensity that you could feel, and you knew he was the creative force in the band.

Sub Pop recognized this. They had decided they wanted Nirvana to record an album, with Jack Endino once again producing. On Christmas Eve, 1988, Nirvana were back at Reciprocal Studios for the first recording session for what would become known as *Bleach*. There would be five more sessions, each of around five hours, until the record was completed on 24 January. Total recording costs came to just over $600 for a record that ultimately would sell one and a half million copies.

Now Kurt revealed a side that others might not expect, visiting the local library and reading books about music business deals. Aware that Sub Pop made it a statement of their company's 'cool' that the label would not issue contracts – secretly because these leftie bohemian 'businessmen' didn't know what a record company contract looked like or might contain – Kurt brought this to the attention of Krist. One night a drunken Krist turned up at Bruce Pavitt's home. He demanded a three-album, three-year deal with Sub Pop, and that they would receive $6,000 in year one, $12,000 in year two, and $18,000 in year three. Sub Pop agreed.

In December 1988, another Nirvana tune appeared, on the *Sub Pop 200* box set. 'Spank Thru' (written by Kurt, with masturbation as its subject) was a really great song, with a burning drive. The song had been recorded on 6 November 1988, but was one of the earliest of Kurt's tunes, first heard on the Fecal Matter tape. It also set the template for the dynamics in almost all Nirvana songs: slow and quiet, followed by loud, fast and forceful.

The recording of *Bleach* was followed by a two-week West Coast tour, bottom of the bill to Mudhoney and the Melvins. There were worries over Kurt's abilities to sing and play guitar simultaneously, so a second guitarist was added. Jason Everman – who had given Nirvana the money to record *Bleach* – got the gig. On 11 February 1989, famously, as though in an effort to upstage his legendary Seattle forebear Jimi Hendrix, Kurt played guitar standing on his head, in San Jose, California.

In 1989 Nirvana would play over a hundred shows, five times what they had managed the previous year. When not on the road, Kurt would stay at home at the Olympia apartment he shared with Tracy. There he would paint all day. 'He'd paint with whatever medium came to hand,' she said. 'Acrylic paints, magic marker, spray cans, blood, pen, pencil – and on whatever improvised canvas he could scarf up at local thrift stores: often the back of board games. On rare occasions, he'd even paint using his own semen. He'd paint aliens, diseased children, grossly distorted childhood images utilizing pop iconographic figures such as Batman and Barbie.'[30]

On 9 June, with Mudhoney and Tad, Nirvana played bottom of the bill at Sub Pop's Lamefest '89 at Seattle's Moore Theater. It was a big event – a year previously these acts couldn't have played such a venue to a packed-out audience. *Bleach* was released days later. Sub Pop were amazed that the record immediately started to sell, as essentially, Nirvana were an almost unknown band. As soon as the record was out, Nirvana set off on their first US tour. They played twenty-six dates, mainly in bars, never earning more than a hundred dollars a night. They often slept in their van, but were tremendously excited that they were now living the full rock 'n' roll travelling band life. Although at first there was rarely a large audience, soon attendances picked up, after college radio began to play tunes from *Bleach* such as 'School' and 'About a Girl'.

Jason Everman, prone to metal rock-star-like movements onstage that jarred with Kurt's 'purist' posture, did not seem to fit in. On 18 July he played his last show with Nirvana, at the Pyramid Club in New York City, part of the New Music Seminar. His fate was sealed after Kurt and Krist got drunk one night – as they seemed to most nights – and then scored some cocaine. While high on the drug, the pair decided that Jason had to go. Jason later joined Soundgarden as bassist.

It was a three-piece Nirvana that undertook a fourteen-day Midwest tour that started at the end of September. The tour began in Minneapolis. That day Kurt suffered so much from stomach ache that he collapsed, violently vomiting, even when there was nothing left in his stomach. He was taken to a hospital but no specific condition was discovered.

Back in the studio, Nirvana recorded an EP, *Blew*, named after its title track. Other songs were the previously released 'Love Buzz', 'Stain' and 'Been a Son'. Three thousand copies were pressed, but it was only released in the UK. There was a specific reason for this. On 20 October 1989, Nirvana and Tad, who would be topping the bill, boarded a plane in Seattle for the ten-hour flight to London, before driving three hundred miles to Newcastle in the north-east of England. This was the first of thirty-six shows in forty-two days. With eleven people jammed into a Fiat van it was almost impossibly claustrophobic, especially for someone claiming to suffer from a fear of confined spaces, as Kurt now was.

The upside was that almost all of the dates were sold out – *Bleach* was in the Top 10 of the UK indie album chart – including the show in Berlin the day after the Berlin wall had come down. Six songs into that show, Kurt destroyed his instrument and stormed off. Exhaustion seemed to have led to feelings of melancholy followed by downright depression. In Rome Kurt clambered up the speakers, then onto the balcony, still strumming his guitar, hollering at the audience that he was going to jump and kill himself. ('Jump!' called the audience.) Backstage he smashed microphones and burst into tears. Jonathan Poneman from Sub Pop was there. According to Kurt, as soon as he claimed to be leaving Nirvana, Poneman offered to sign him as a solo artist. But Bruce Pavitt and Poneman had made a major strategic error. They had arrived backstage at the Rome gig as a measure of support, flying in from Seattle. By thus indulging in long-distance air-travel, staying in hotels more luxurious than anything the band members had ever seen, they earned Kurt's abiding enmity. 'Though Nirvana would stay on Sub Pop for another year, in a progressively worsening marriage, Kurt had already emotionally jettisoned his label,' said his biographer Charles R. Cross.[31]

Kurt pulled himself together and the tour moved back to London for its final show, on 3 December, at London's Astoria. Although *Melody Maker*, which had championed Nirvana, turned against them, Keith Cameron of *Sounds* proclaimed them 'the most amazing band I'd ever seen.'

The next day Nirvana recorded a session for John Peel, the revered BBC disc jockey and relentless champion of the underground.

Back in the USA, Nirvana played some Californian dates, before another national tour. Now they were pulling in audiences of a few hundred. Despite the buzz of being championed by Sonic Youth, who had come to see them on the previous tour, the band played badly at their New York Pyramid Club show. Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore were in the audience, along with Iggy Pop; and, significantly, Gary Gersh, an A&R man for the Geffen label.

Despite their growing buzz, when Nirvana played a Seattle New Year's Eve show at the end of 1989, only fifty people turned up. In the venue's dressing room, Kurt wrote on a wall: 'Do it again for another!' – an expression of his altruism towards his fellow man. 'He was so personable and so fucking cool,' said his friend Amy Moon, who was there that night. 'Kurt was totally a listener … One of the few people I've met who listened to what you said.'

Back in Olympia, in March 1990 Kurt and his friend Damon Romero decided one night to rent a video, choosing Alex Cox's *Straight to Hell*, a spaghetti thriller starring former Clash singer Joe Strummer. Although the film had been critically trounced, Kurt – unsurprisingly – liked it. He and Romero also noted the presence in the film of a girl they had noticed in a club in Portland, Oregon: Courtney Love.

On 3 April 1990 Nirvana arrived at Smart Studios in Madison, Wisconsin, the premises of Butch Vig, not only a record producer but also a drummer. Kurt believed – correctly – that Vig could achieve the drum sound he felt was so absent from their recordings, and which increasingly he believed Chad was unable to deliver. In a week they recorded eight songs, including 'In Bloom', 'Breed' and 'Pay to Play'. They were intended for the next Nirvana album, which Kurt had decided should be titled 'Sheep'.

As doors were opening professionally for Nirvana, others were closing emotionally for Kurt Cobain, now once again drinking heavily. On Tracy's birthday in late April, she received a phone call from Kurt, on tour. He told her that he still wanted to be her boyfriend, but no longer wanted to live with

her. Unusually, Kurt then had sex with a girl while on the road in Texas, the one time his bandmates recalled him behaving in such a manner. He cursed himself afterwards for his weakness. It was an unsatisfactory, depressing experience, and he later told Tracy about it.

Nirvana were also aware that their relationship with Sub Pop was becoming problematic. Like many independent labels, Sub Pop was forever stymied by its distribution network. Nirvana would arrive on tour in a town and find no copies of *Bleach* in the local stores. By the summer of 1990, Sub Pop were aware that Nirvana had decided to leave the label.

Moreover, the group leaving Sub Pop would be without a drummer. In mid-June Kurt and Krist took the ferry over to Bainbridge Island to let Chad know that he was out of the group. The same week Tracy moved out of the apartment, which Kurt took over.

The truth was that Kurt had fallen for another girl, Tobi Vail, an Olympia musician a year younger than him with an enormous knowledge of punk music. She had also had a better education than Kurt. A feminist, who had coined the phrase 'riot grrrl' and was forming a band called Bikini Kill, Tobi's rants about sexual politics fascinated Kurt – who was obliged to put to the back of his mind the porn magazines he had leered at in the van in Europe. However, as Charles R. Cross recalled, a person with such views was not precisely who Kurt was looking for: 'What Kurt was searching for in a relationship was the kind of family intimacy he had lacked since early childhood; but Tobi rejected the traditional relationship he sought as sexist.' Yet his endless late-night discussions – and less frequent late-night sex – with Tobi had been inspiring. 'Punk rock is freedom' was a rubric he coined while hanging with Tobi, and he would quote it at every opportunity.

Kurt and Krist were now sending cassettes of their Butch Vig sessions to major labels. Punk purist Tobi declared that she would never sign with a major. Did this manifest some inner conflict for Kurt Cobain? On a radio interview in April, he had declared: 'We don't have any interest in a major label. It would be nice to have better distribution, but anything else that goes on major labels is just a bunch of shit.'

Then Kurt did the precise opposite, enlisting the assistance of Susan Silver, Soundgarden's manager. Kurt and Krist met Alan Mintz, a top-end Los Angeles-based music business lawyer who understood the Butch Vig tape, and vowed to sign them to a major. After the relative success of *Bleach*, and many positive reviews, there was already a considerable buzz over Nirvana.

Nirvana were scheduled to record another single for Sub Pop. They brought in Dan Peters from Mudhoney on drums and recorded the tune, 'Sliver', while Tad, busy recording an album, took time off for a meal. As far as Kurt's writing went, 'Sliver' was a serious development. It told the autobiographical story of a boy who is left by his mother and father to be baby-sat by his grandparents. 'It also,' according to Charles R. Cross, 'was one of the first Nirvana songs to use contrasting dynamics, which would become a signature for the band: the verses were quiet and slow, but the chorus came in as a thunderous wall of sound.'[32] The song ends with Greta Garbo's moody (and misquoted) imprecation, 'I want to be alone.'

For an August tour of the West Coast with Sonic Youth, Dale Crover was brought back in as drummer. When he had to return to the Melvins, in came Dan Peters, for a show on 22 September, at the Motor Sports International Garage in Seattle. Although Dale was told Nirvana were getting ready for a UK tour, he would not play with them ever again. In the audience was someone Buzz Osbourne had brought along – Dave Grohl. Grohl was legendary for the power with which he hit drums and for his across-the-kit attack in the group Scream, a Virginia hardcore outfit.

Dave Grohl had been born in Warren, Ohio, on 14 January 1969. At the age of twelve he had begun to play guitar. When he formed a punk band, Freak Baby, Dave became so dispirited by the ineffectual drummer he decided he could do better on the kit himself. At sixteen, Dave discovered Led Zeppelin and – specifically – the drumming of John Bonham.

Kurt and Krist had been in San Francisco and, hearing Scream had a great drummer, had gone to see them play there. Twenty days after the Motor Sports International Garage concert, Dave drummed for the first time with Nirvana at the North Shore Surf Club in Olympia. 'We knew in two minutes that he was the right drummer,' said Krist.

Almost immediately afterwards they were off to the UK for a five-date sell-out tour. 'It looks like it's gonna be pretty easy to find a big deal, we've just got to try to keep from being fucked,' Kurt told Liz Evans for *Raw* magazine in England. Clearly he was utterly aware of Nirvana's position and his group's emerging potential. 'It's a hard problem,' he agreed. 'Because we feel that we're diverse and accessible enough to try to infiltrate into more than just one market. We feel we can appeal to more than just the Metal or the Alternative Rock market. We want to try to be mainstream too. We want to reach the Top 40. Even if the whole of the next album can't get across to that type of audience there's at least a hit single or two in there.

'Our next album is going to be so diverse that we really have no choice but to cross over. We can't be classified into this simple heavy Grunge Rock category anymore. We've moved a long way on from there.'

Back in Seattle, Kurt and Krist were flown down to LA by MCA Records for an unfruitful meeting with label executives. Meeting up with Sonic Youth, who happened to be in the city, Nirvana were urged by these alternative standard-bearers to check out their own management, Gold Mountain, and to sign with Geffen Records – Sonic Youth were on the label's DGC imprint.

In Olympia Dave Grohl moved in with Kurt, who had been living on his own and seemed in an increasing state of isolation, especially as he and Tobi were hardly seeing each other. Now, however, Dave started going out with Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hannah, and Kurt and Tobi would often be with them. At Kurt's house one night, Kathleen Hannah added a piece of graffiti to a wall in the apartment shared by the two Nirvana musicians: 'Kurt smells like teen spirit,' a reference to the Teen Spirit deodorant that Tobi used. By November, however, Tobi had dumped Kurt, which he did not take well. He retreated into himself again, often seeming to seethe with rage, his mental state exacerbating his permanent stomach pains.

But the breakup was positive for his art. In subsequent months he wrote a string of his best songs, all of them about Tobi, including 'Aneurysm', 'Drain You', 'Lounge Act' and – most significantly, of course – 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'. He also introduced a new personality into the writings in his journal: her name was spelt 'heroine'. This wilfully coy use of the word heroin – as though by so archly misspelling it, he removed the danger – perhaps concealed his true feelings about, or fear of, females. He promised Tracy, with whom he had had something of a reconciliation, that he only would do the drug occasionally.

When Kurt signed a publishing deal with Virgin, his first payment came as a $3,000 cheque. He spent $1,000 at Toys R Us, his purchases including a couple of air rifles, with which he shot out the windows at a nearby building housing the Washington State Lottery.

Days later, Nirvana were visited by John Silva, the partner of former Led Zeppelin publicist Danny Goldberg at Gold Mountain Management, who oversaw the career of Sonic Youth. Gold Mountain secured Nirvana a deal with DGC, the same Geffen imprint to which Sonic Youth were signed, for $287,000, a very substantial advance. (It was not until 30 April 1991 that the contract was finally completed.) From the advance Kurt received wages of $1,000 a month. Although for years he had been living on far less, the $250 a week was somehow never enough. After falling behind on his rent, Kurt for a time was reduced to living in his car. For much of the time he ate only corn dogs – hardly the best diet for a man incessantly plagued by violent stomach pains.

To record their first album – what would become *Nevermind* – Kurt and Krist wanted to continue working with Butch Vig. While they were in Los Angeles recording, Courtney Love began to call by to see Kurt. Since they had first met at a show in Portland in 1989, she had been very taken with him. 'I just

thought he was really beautiful. He was really cool and he had really beautiful hands,' she said.[33] With worrying prescience, Kurt's first impression of Courtney Love was that she looked like Nancy Spungen – 'Nancy' as in 'Sid'n'Nancy'. Running into each other at a Butthole Surfers show at the Los Angeles Palladium, Courtney showed her affection for Kurt by hitting him in the belly, before – as though in some primitive mating ritual – they began wrestling with each other.

A highly intelligent woman, Courtney Love was clearly driven towards stardom. In March 1990, she had started the group Hole. A former stripper and Oregon reform school alumnus, she had lived in Liverpool in the UK, on the scene with the Teardrop Explodes and Echo and the Bunnymen. She had also had a film part – the one Kurt had seen – in Alex Cox's *Straight to Hell*. And she could talk until hell froze over. According to her former longstanding boyfriend from Portland, Courtney's ambition was tempered by conventional belief: 'She thought it was a male-dominated world. She thought the only way she could achieve stardom was through a man.'

At first Kurt was intent on not getting into another relationship. His purpose in Los Angeles was to make a successful album; he was inspired by the city's spirit-lifting ceaseless sunshine, a considerable contrast to that of Seattle. Sound City Studios in Van Nuys in the San Fernando Valley was the reasonably priced recording complex recommended to Nirvana by DGC. The first record made there had been Neil Young's masterly *After the Goldrush*. Later in the 1970s Fleetwood Mac had recorded their enormously successful *Rumour* album at Sound City. As Kurt was not acquainted with any local heroin dealers, he resorted to drinking codeine-based cough syrup throughout the sessions. Purist Kurt would often refuse to record a second take.

The record was finally mixed by Andy Wallace, who had worked magic on Slayer's *Seasons in the Abyss*. 'Wallace sweetened the sound, filtering the raw tracks through various special effects boxes, cranking out about one mix a day,' said Azerrad.[34] The record was completed, at a cost of $65,000, by mid-June 1991. Almost immediately Kurt found himself suffering from that sense of being utterly underwhelmed and empty – on top of the overriding depression to which he was always prone – that often follows the successful completion of creative work.

But for now it was on with the show. Nirvana undertook a week-long West Coast tour, supporting Dinosaur Jr. The shows, which included dates in Denver, Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, were notable for revealing the audience's air of expectation about Nirvana.

Then, in August, it was back to Europe. Once again, Nirvana were the opening act for Sonic Youth, on a tour with plenty of festival dates. On 23 August, they played Reading Festival, on the main stage at 2 p.m, before a 50,000-strong audience. Flinging himself into the drum kit, Kurt suffered a minor shoulder dislocation. Backstage was Courtney Love, with her then boyfriend Billy Corgan of Smashing Pumpkins.

Back on the West Coast, at a sound stage in Culver City in Los Angeles, Nirvana filmed a video for 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'. It was a parody of a high school gym performance, with an elderly janitor mopping the floor – as Kurt had done at his former high school.

The cover image for *Nevermind* was established. It featured a picture of five-month-old Spencer Elden, a naked baby swimming. At least subconsciously, this was an expression of the excess of water signs in Kurt's astrological chart. This was something he was acutely aware of, and a clue to his almost overwhelming sensitivity – he would even refer to his astrological sign in his eventual suicide note. An addition to the image was a dollar bill suspended in the water to which the baby appeared to be heading – a twist that was Kurt's idea. The baby's penis was clearly visible, surviving suggestions from censorship-wary DGC employees that it might require airbrushing out.

As though facing down fate, *Nevermind* was released on Friday, 13 September 1991, with an album launch party in Seattle. Kurt found himself embarrassed at how the local scene would respond to his record company's inevitable overzealous dressing of the hip Re-bar with a myriad Nirvana posters. Neatly pressed company employees had flown up en masse from LA. After *Nevermind* had been played

twice, a cringing Kurt had the DJ replace the Nirvana music with cheesy disco and New Wave. Then the event erupted into a food fight, at which point Nirvana were asked to leave.

On 16 September, three days later, the trio played an instore show at the city's Beehive Records. Fans appeared from as far away as Montesano. 'I realized that if people you went to high school with – especially in Montesano – were aware that I was a rock star in Seattle, then it was getting kind of big,' Kurt said.[35] In response, all three Nirvana men went out and got drunk.

Was there another dimension to Kurt's cynicism? For an ultimately fatal subplot developed almost simultaneously with the release of *Nevermind*. The same month that this ostensibly mainstream album came out, Kurt had consciously decided to become a 'heroine' addict.[36] He later wrote down his experiences of the drug for a treatment programme. He said he had first tried heroin in Aberdeen in 1987, and until 1990 had done it around ten more times:

'When I got back from our second European tour with Sonic Youth, I decided to use heroine on a daily basis because of an ongoing stomach ailment that I had been suffering from for the past five years, [and that] had literally taken me to the point of wanting to kill myself … the only thing I found that worked were heavy opiates … So I decided, if I feel like a junkie as it is, I may as well be one.'[37]

He also wrote that after he and Courtney Love, a different 'heroine' who would bear his daughter, would later spent a fortnight coming off the drug, 'I instantly regained that familiar burning nausea and decided to either kill myself or stop the pain. I bought a gun but chose drugs instead. I stayed on heroine until one month before Frances due date.' Later it would sometimes be asserted that it was Courtney who had got Kurt into heroin. But the opposite is true. She had developed a heroin habit in Los Angeles in 1989, but had successfully undergone treatment and come off the drug. When she and Kurt first fully got together, Courtney was so smitten that the relationship continued despite his ongoing use.

For some time, Kurt had wanted to become part of a sort of Sex Pistols-like punk act, exploding quickly and suddenly. When they had been about to sign their deal, he had joked of getting the DGC advance and immediately splitting up. An emulation of the Pistols seems to have been an aspect of Kurt's thinking, certainly if we recall how Courtney reminded him of Nancy Spungen. But did some part of Kurt also want to be the tragic Sid Vicious? As things would turn out, such a conceit would not prove to be too far-fetched.

Although they would become increasingly dominant in subsequent months, such extra-curricular interests needed to be put to one side. On 20 September 1991, Nirvana embarked on a headlining North American tour, on which they were at first supported by the Melvins.

A month into the shows, they started moving up the West Coast from San Diego. If they were lucky, Geffen Records had expected *Nevermind* to sell 50,000 copies. So when the album began to sell in unanticipated amounts they quickly had to order further pressings. 'The album had sold 100,000 copies by San Diego, 200,000 by LA, and by the morning they hit Seattle, for a Halloween show, it had gone gold, selling half a million,' wrote Charles R. Cross. In Seattle Nirvana played the Paramount Theater. Kurt's guitar had a message stuck on it: VANDALISM: BEAUTIFUL AS A ROCK IN A COP'S FACE. This was a gesture which might be felt to be playing to punk's lowest common denominator.

The night of the Seattle show, at which Kurt had insisted they be supported by Tobi's Bikini Kill, his former girlfriend ended up as one of the clump of friends sleeping on the floor of Kurt's hotel room. 'It was a small irony,' said Cross, 'that Tobi was sleeping on his floor the day he'd sold half a million copies of an album that was ostensibly about how she didn't love him.'

In November, Nirvana were off to Europe again. Courtney's group Hole were booked onto the same circuit, their schedule commencing a fortnight later. At first their blossoming love affair was complicated by the presence of another American woman, Mary Lou Lord, with whom Kurt had had an affair earlier in the year, and who surprised him by turning up at Nirvana's Bristol show on 4 November. Kurt told her of the growing severity of his stomach pains.

He was aware, however, of the imminent arrival of Courtney, and in a very public way, Mary Lou learned that her relationship with Kurt was doomed. Appearing on *The Word*, a Friday night 'youth' television show, Kurt announced to the British nation, 'I just want everyone in this room to know that Courtney Love, of the pop group Hole, is the best fuck in the world!' Suddenly, as a result of this declaration, Kurt Cobain was fodder for the front pages of the mass-market media.

And Kurt was adept at giving the media what they desired. On 27 November, Nirvana recorded a slot for BBC television's long-running chart show, *Top of the Pops*. 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' was charging up the UK singles chart – reaching number 9 that week – but in his performance Kurt sent up such glory by dropping his voice an octave and changing the opening line to 'Load up on drugs, kill your friends'. Meanwhile, Krist and Dave made it obvious that they were miming playing their instruments.

The European tour ended with a date in France on 7 December; then Nirvana flew back to Seattle; there Kurt was astonished how successful they had become in their homeland during their overseas absence. 'We'd finished the ['Teen Spirit'] video and they started to play it while we were on tour,' Kurt said, 'and I would get reports every once in a while from friends of mine, telling me that I was famous. So it didn't affect me until probably three months after we'd been famous in America … a friend of mine made a compilation about all the news stories about our band that was played on MTV and the local news programmes and stuff. It was frightening: it just scared me.'[38]

After a brief end-of-year West Coast tour, concluding at San Francisco's Cow Palace on New Year's Eve, the band flew to New York. Nirvana were scheduled to perform on *Saturday Night Live* on 11 January 1992. The previous day the band did a photo session with Michael Lavine at his Bleecker Street loft. Kurt, his hair dyed bright red, nodded out several times, the effects of heroin now evident to those around him. 'I remember people having to go out and score dope. I remember Kurt telling me that the reason that he loved Courtney so much was that she was the only girl he knew that would stand up at a party and smash a glass table to bits just for the hell of it. I remember thinking that was a pretty odd reason to love someone,' said the photographer.[39]

By the end of 1991, sales of *Nevermind* in the United States were growing exponentially. But the album seemed unable to climb higher than the number 6 slot. The week after Christmas, however, its sales catapulted when kids went out and spent their present money – or returned unwanted album gifts. In those seven days 400,000 copies of *Nevermind* were sold, and the album knocked Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* off the top slot in the *Billboard* charts, where it seemed to have taken up permanent residency. Suddenly they were the biggest group in the world. 'Nirvana is that rare band that has everything: critical acclaim, industry respect, pop radio appeal, and a rock-solid college/alternative base,' trumpeted *Billboard*, the American music business trade paper.

Now, with their album at number 1, Nirvana would appear on *Saturday Night Live*, a show that commanded huge viewing figures and was also extremely credible. Yet for this performance on American network television, Kurt was smacked out. He had to force himself not to throw up, and his eyes looked sunken into his head – a sign he had shot up earlier in the evening. But he rose to the moment with blistering performances of 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' and 'Territorial Pissings', before stabbing his guitar neck through several speakers while Dave Grohl tossed his entire drum kit about the stage.

As the show's end credits rolled over the conclusion of their performance, Nirvana decided to do their utmost to 'piss off the rednecks and homophobes', in Kurt's words, as he later claimed credit for something Krist Novoselic had instigated. On camera the bass player came over to Kurt and French-kissed him, a gesture both loving and supportive.

During an interview following the performance, Kurt 'borrowed' $40 from the journalist, enough to buy a handy amount of smack. Kurt got off on the seedy social underbelly that is a feature of the ritual, lonely world of heroin, especially in New York City, where he would line up with other addicts to score smack in Alphabet City on the Lower East Side. What was on sale on the East Coast was China white –

stronger than the Mexican black tar heroin available on the West Coast.

And it was in Manhattan that the full extent of Kurt's heroin problem became apparent to those around him. Returning to his hotel, he climbed into bed next to Courtney. When Courtney Love woke the next morning, she found Kurt had overdosed on heroin. She managed to revive him. As a counterpoint to such darkness, it was around now that Courtney found out she was pregnant. She claimed she stopped using drugs as soon as she learned this.

With his girlfriend pregnant, Kurt temporarily rose to the responsibilities of impending fatherhood. After flying to Los Angeles, both he and Courtney checked into a motel. This was on the advice of a doctor whose chosen field of expertise was rapid detox. He felt they needed to be somewhere quiet and discreet . Under the influence of sleeping tablets and methadone, they both endured this shock treatment – feverish, puking, and devastated from diarrhoea. Halfway through this process, Kurt was obliged to be in a video being made in LA for 'Come as You Are', the next single off *Nevermind*, but he only did so on the understanding that the film would not feature a single clear image of his gaunt, blotchy face.

As so often with Kurt he had more than one reason for trying to get clean. Yes, he was allegedly readying himself for the birth of his child. But at the end of January Kurt was due to fly to Australia, followed by New Zealand, Hawaii and Japan, for a tour, and he was worried that in these unknown territories he wouldn't be able to score.

The tour proved as deleterious as Kurt had feared. Hardly speaking to his bandmates, and doubled up from stomach pain, he ended up being prescribed Physeptone, a synthetic heroin substitute – or methadone, as it is better known.

In Japan the record company was at a loss as to how to behave after Kurt's controversial declaration on arriving in the country, announcing he was there to 'repay the cunts for Pearl Harbor'.

Then he was off to the land of Pearl Harbor itself, Honolulu. Courtney had joined Kurt in Japan. During the plane flight the pair agreed to marry in Hawaii. A prenuptial agreement was signed by both parties. (Although Kurt had yet to receive the colossal amounts of money that would shortly flow his way from the success of *Nevermind* and lucrative live shows, he knew full well he could build significant wealth. But their relationship would not be financially one-sided: Hole were about to sign a deal with DGC for a million dollars and a higher royalty rate than Nirvana, which was important for Courtney's self-esteem.)

On 24 February 1992, Kurt and Courtney married on Waikiki Beach. Kurt wore blue-check pyjamas – habitual garb for him by now. Courtney wore an antique silk dress that had once belonged to Frances Farmer, the actor, also from Seattle, who at the peak of her career had suffered egregious mistreatment of her mental health problems.

For the wedding Kurt arranged for Dylan Carlson to be flown over from Seattle to act as his best man. A subtext to this role was Kurt's inability to find quality 'heroine' on the island but by the time of the ceremony he was slightly out of it on smack[40]. The sentiment of the occasion could still reach him, though, and at times he burst into sobs. 'She's my one and only chance,' was how he defined Courtney Love to Dave Grohl.

None of Kurt's family had been invited, and Kurt had banned Krist's wife Shelli from the event because he believed she had been talking behind Courtney's back. The next day, when Krist and Shelli flew out of Hawaii, they believed that Nirvana had broken up. 'Kurt's a fucking junkie asshole and I hate him!' Krist cried to Shelli. After the wedding, he and Krist could never be the same. Although he and Dave had also been like brothers, Kurt was now talking about firing the drummer. Kurt really had formed Nirvana to have a group to play his songs. So for the sake of personal expediency he had no problems with the idea of dumping Krist and Dave. He made them sign a retroactive deal over songwriting credits, giving himself the lion's share of songwriting royalties – perhaps not unreasonably, as essentially the songs were all his.

Nirvana did not in fact perform for another four months. This was unsurprising, really, as over the ensuing spring Kurt did little except take drugs after he and Courtney had flown back to Los Angeles. Dave Grohl was furious: there had been plans for a lengthy arena tour that spring, which had been aborted.

There were occasional efforts at self-control. In March Kurt entered an inpatient dependency unit at Cedars-Sinai hospital in Beverly Hills, where his heroin intake was swapped for methadone. In an interview that appeared in *Rolling Stone* the next month, Kurt expounded his personal worldview as he imagined it the instant of the interview: 'I don't even drink anymore because it destroys my stomach. My body wouldn't allow me to take drugs if I wanted to, because I'm so weak. All drugs [do is] destroy your memory and your self-respect and everything that goes along with your self-esteem. They're no good at all.'

In April Kurt and his new bride flew up to Seattle to look for a house to buy. On a visit to his sister Kim in Aberdeen, he threatened her that if she ever used heroin, he would get a gun and kill her. Kim was aware that Kurt was projecting his own inner hell onto her.[41] In January Kurt had been spending $100 a day on heroin. Six months later it was up to four times that, a staggering amount.

At the beginning of the summer, Nirvana were thrown back together, honouring a booked European tour which kicked off with a Dublin date on Sunday, 21 June. Five days later they played the massive annual Roskilde festival in Denmark, outside Copenhagen. There were further festival dates, in Norway, Finland, France and Spain. And in late August, Nirvana returned to the UK, to again play Reading festival, this time headlining. The show began with Kurt singing a couple of lines of Bette Midler's 'The Rose' after being wheeled onstage in a wheelchair by *Melody Maker* journalist Everett True.

While onstage at Reading, Kurt may have had something on his mind. In an article published in the September edition of *Vanity Fair*, which appeared in early August, Courtney Love confirmed to writer Lynn Hirschberg that she and Cobain had been using heroin early in her pregnancy. The article, still on the newsstands on 18 August 1992, the date of birth of Frances Bean Cobain, would have devastating implications. Although both Courtney and Kurt claimed that Hirschberg took her words out of context, child welfare services launched an investigation questioning their parenting abilities. Although the investigation was eventually called off, it was not before Frances had been removed from her parents' custody for a short time, beginning when she was two weeks old.

Returning to Los Angeles from a triumphant visit to England at the beginning of September, Kurt decided once again to enter a treatment programme, this time at Exodus in Marina del Rey. Was the new responsibility of fatherhood weighing on his conscience? Or was it fear of the consequences of the *Vanity Fair* article? At Exodus he was prescribed buprenorphine, an anti-addiction drug which almost had the effect of immediately relieving his stomach pains.

Kurt took a brief leave of absence from Exodus to appear on the MTV Awards show. When Kurt announced he wanted to play 'Rape Me', a new song, the MTV bigwigs were apoplectic. On learning that the MTV employee assigned to deal directly with them would be fired if they played the song, the band agreed to stick to the agreed number, 'Lithium'. Live, to the MTV executives' horror, Kurt played the opening chords of 'Rape Me' … before strutting into 'Lithium', as promised. Backstage Kurt and Courtney, with Frances on her lap, found themselves face to face with Axl Rose, an especial bête noire of Kurt's on account of his absurd rock star posturing, and his model girlfriend – rock star model girlfriends were sneered at by Courtney as an ultimate cliché. When Courtney asked Rose if he would be Frances's godfather, the Guns N' Roses man was not oblivious to her intended sarcasm. 'You shut your bitch up, or I'm taking you down to the pavement,' he threatened Kurt. Kurt responded with a smile: 'Okay, bitch. Shut up.' [42] Rose and his girlfriend departed, tails between their legs.

The next day there was a Nirvana show in Portland, followed by a benefit against music censorship in Seattle. At the 16,000-seater sold-out Seattle date, Kurt's father Don showed up backstage, the first

time Kurt had seen him for eight years. Also present was his mother Wendy and his sister Kim. When Kurt began to raise his voice towards his father, Wendy led the others out of the dressing room. Later – unusually – Kurt walked to the stage in utter silence to perform the finest show Seattle had ever had from Nirvana. Don's reappearance would grant Kurt songwriting material, specifically for the autobiographical 'Serve the Servants'.

For some weeks Kurt and Courtney stayed in assorted expensive Seattle hotels, Kurt worryingly registering as Simon Ritchie, the real name of Sid Vicious. They had bought a house overlooking Lake Washington, some thirty miles away, and it was being substantially rebuilt and renovated. As cigarette burns and drug detritus built up in hotel rooms which they would request were never cleaned, invariably they would finally be kicked out of these assorted lodgings. During this time in Seattle, in October 1992, Nirvana recorded several songs, mainly as instrumentals. The demo session was with Jack Endino, the *Bleach* producer, and many of these songs would later be re-recorded for *In Uterh*.

That autumn of 1992, with Frances still kept from them, Kurt and Courtney seemed on the edge of madness. Cracks were very visible. When Victoria Clarke, an Irish journalist, announced she was proposing to write an unauthorized biography of Nirvana, Courtney was enraged. She called up Clarke and – accompanied by Kurt – left a 31-minute harangue on her answering machine. Some of Kurt's threats went as follows: 'At this point I don't give a flying fuck if I have this recorded that I'm threatening you. I suppose I could throw out a few thousand dollars to have you snuffed out, but maybe I'll try the legal way. First.' Surprisingly vicious words from a man who, in 1992, was the world's leading stoner anti-hero.

Two weeks before Christmas 1992, a 'new' Nirvana album was in the stores. *Incesticide* was a collection of fifteen tunes, some previously released. Tracks included 'Dive' and 'Sliver' from the 'Sliver' single; cover tunes like the Vaselines' 'Son of a Gun' and Devo's 'Turnaround' from *Hormoaning*, a Nirvana EP released only in Australia and Japan in 1992; 'Downer' from Bleach; and 'Mexican Seafood' from a 1989 Sub Pop compilation. The cover art was a painting by Kurt. Hardly promoted by DGC, whose desire to have more Nirvana 'product' on sale was presumably balanced against the intended release the next year of a brand new album by the band, the record almost immediately sold half a million copies in the US, where it made the Top 40.

In January 1993, Nirvana played a pair of enormous festival dates in Brazil. The first show, in Sao Paulo, had an audience of 110,000. Kurt was drinking and taking pills and could hardly play. Much of the set consisted of cover versions: when playing Queen's 'We Will Rock You', Kurt changed the lyrics to 'We will fuck you.'

After performing 'Territorial Pissings', Kurt dived into the audience, smashed his guitar, and lobbed pieces of it to the crowd. Some forty minutes into the set, a frustrated Krist hurled his bass at Kurt and walked off stage. Contracted to play for ninety minutes to secure their mammoth fee, the crew were obliged to fetch Krist to finish the set. When Krist returned, he picked up his bass from the stage, not bothering to retune it. At which point a guitar tech rolled a cantaloupe melon onstage. Kurt started smashing the fruit on his guitar strings, playing his guitar with it. Then the band switched instruments, with Kurt on drums, Krist on guitar, and Dave on bass. A portion of the audience walked out in disgust.

'The band started to really fail me emotionally,' Kurt said, in a partial explanation to Jon Savage, 'because a lot of it had to do with the fact that we were playing a lot of these festivals in the daytime. There's nothing more boring than doing that. The audiences are massive and none of them care what band is up on stage. I was just getting over my drug addiction, or trying to battle that, and it was just too much. For the rest of the year I kept going back and forth between wanting to quit and wanting to change our name, cos I still really enjoy playing with Chris and Dave and I couldn't see us splitting up because of the pressures of success. It's just pathetic, you know: to have to do something like that. I don't know if there is much of a conscious connection between Chris and Dave and I, when we play live. I don't usually even notice Chris and Dave: I'm in my own world. I'm not saying it doesn't matter whether they're there or not,

that I could hire studio musicians or something. I know it wouldn't be the same.'

The next Brazil show was in Rio de Janeiro a week later: Kurt opened the performance with a few lines from Electric Light Orchestra's 'Telephone Line'. Kurt, who had had a row with Courtney, had been threatening to jump out of a high window of his hotel. Eventually the tour manager found Kurt a hotel with a room on the ground floor, which was a dosshouse compared to the palatial five-star hotel into which he had been booked.

In their time off between the two Brazilian shows, the three group members were supposed to be working on new songs, sessions already having been booked for recording a new album. After his first night in his down-at-heel hotel, Kurt showed up the next day at the demo studio in Rio, ready to work. He had with him the first version of a new song, 'Heart-Shaped Box', which they played at the Rio show on 23 January, along with another newie, 'Scentless Apprentice'.

Kurt was insisting that the new album would be entitled *I Hate Myself and I Want to Die*. Several times in his journals he had written this phrase. 'When Kurt used to come out with that I Hate Myself and I Want to Die stuff,' said Jon Savage, 'people would completely miss his sense of humour. He was being very ironic: I asked him about this when I interviewed him.'

On Valentine's Day, 1993, Nirvana journeyed to Pachyderm Studios, in woodland near tiny Cannon Falls in Minnesota, to begin recording their new album. The facility had been selected by Nirvana's record company for its pastoral isolation – one that would hopefully ensure the absence of negative characters. Steve Albini, former member of Big Black, a major influence on Kurt, was producing: Kurt loved some of his other productions, notably the Pixies' *Surfer Rosa* and the Breeders' *Pod*.

After six days, the group had down the basic tracks. The entire album took half as long as *Nevermind* to make. Among the songs were 'Heart-Shaped Box' and 'Pennyroyal Tea', 'two of Nirvana's most accomplished works,' according to Charles R. Cross.[43] Yet Courtney Love's own, tighter lyrical writing had clearly influenced her husband. Over subsequent weeks, the *I Hate Myself and I Want to Die* title was changed, first to *Verse, Chorus, Verse*, and then to *In Utero*, a line from a poem by Courtney.

In March 1993 Kurt and Courtney moved into a relatively modest rented house at 11301 Lakeside Avenue NE in Seattle, as the house they had bought was several months from being ready to live in. To get around the city, Kurt bought a grey 1986 Volvo 240DL, stylish and safe.

A social worker from Los Angeles flew up to Seattle and declared herself satisfied that Frances was being cared for correctly. But the controversy over Kurt and Courtney's child's custody had cost almost a quarter of a million dollars in legal fees. Inevitably, there was a problem with nannies. Unable to cope with the 'bohemian' lifestyle of the parents, they seemed to arrive and leave the house as though through a revolving door.

Kurt's relationship with Don, his own father, remained largely unresolved. That spring of 1993, Kurt wrote a letter to Don which he never sent. It concluded: 'I've never taken sides with you or my mother because while I was growing up, I had equal contempt for you both.'

The huge success of Nirvana was played out against the background of assorted vicious territorial wars in what was now former Yugoslavia. For Krist Novoselic, with his Croatian blood, this must have been deeply troubling. On 9 April 1993, Nirvana played at a benefit for Bosnian rape victims at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. They showcased eight new songs, all of which would be on *In Utero*. Also on the bill were L7, the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy and the Breeders.

Meanwhile, waiting in the wings was the release of *In Utero*. Despite having wanted Steve Albini to produce the record, Kurt now thought the sound was a little too raw. Scott Litt, who had produced four REM albums, including 1992's massive breakthrough *Automatic for the People*, was brought in to make 'Heart-Shaped Box' and 'All Apologies', both obvious singles, more radio-friendly. Acting in archetypal punk situationist manner, Kurt threatened to release the original Albini mix album as *I Hate Myself and I Want to Die*. A month after this, he said he would release the remixed record, with the title *Verse, Chorus,*

Verse.

On a more domestic level, on Sunday, 2 May 1993, police and an ambulance were called to Kurt and Courtney's rented Seattle house, following reports of a drug overdose on the premises. Kurt had come home smacked up, and when challenged by Courtney, he had retreated to a locked bedroom.

Kurt had taken to disappearing off into Seattle's druggy hinterlands, specifically Aurora Avenue, with its drug connections, hookers and seedy motels: Kurt loved to check into the Marco Polo Inn, where he would hole up doing heroin. 'There were many overdoses and near-death situations, as many as a dozen during 1993 alone,' wrote Charles R. Cross.[44]

Yet on the part of Courtney, there were serious and strenuous efforts being made in the spring and summer of 1993 to get clean. She was attending Narcotics Anonymous, drinking only fruit juice, and taking advice from a psychic. Later, however, there would be relapses. Yet her husband was increasingly withdrawn, in a state of acute depression. The junkie's world is one of secrecy and sneakiness, not exactly conducive to positive character development, and one in which addicts are prone to fits of status anxiety and oneupmanship. It was during those months that Kurt declared he was going to get into crack, a drug neither he nor Courtney had previously abused.

On 1 June 1993, Courtney staged – in the jargon of dependency therapy – an 'intervention' at the house, in which friends would express their concern, urge Kurt to sort himself out, and offer assistance to do this. His friend Nils Bernstein was there, as well as his mother Wendy and Krist. 'You could see in Kurt's face that he was thinking, "Nothing in your life relates to anything in my life,"' remembered Nils. In front of them, on the wall with a red marker, Kurt scrawled, 'None of you will ever know my true intent'. [45]

A month later, on 1 July, Hole played one of their first shows in months, at the Off Ramp in Seattle. Kurt was there, very evidently off his head on something – he had to be helped to walk. Brian Willis of the *NME* went back to the house with Courtney. Kurt – who by now seemed to have come down from his drug intake – was at home. However he kept out of the way as Courtney played Willis *In Utero* – the first time a member of the press had heard the record.

As dawn broke Kurt brought them hot chocolate and muffins.

This is what Brian Willis wrote: 'For someone who's been through so much shit in the past two years, whose name's being dragged through acrimony once again, who's about to release a record the whole rock world's desperate to hear and be faced with astonishing attention and pressure, Kurt Cobain's a remarkably contented man.'

In Utero was released on 14 September 1993. If anything, it was an even greater record than *Nevermind*. The album entered the US album charts at number 1, selling 180,000 copies in the first week – even though the US super chains Wal-Mart and Kmart refused to stock it. This was in response to the song 'Rape Me', which was actually an anti-rape, life-affirming song, as much about Kurt's imagined treatment by the media as sexual brutality. 'One of the reasons I signed to a major label,' said Kurt, 'was so people would be able to buy our records at Kmart. In some towns, that's the only place kids can buy records.'

Although Kurt had declared at the beginning of 1993 that he wouldn't tour to support his new album, his arm appeared to have been twisted. Could the lure of money have played a part in this? Kurt's income for 1993 was already estimated to be over $2 million, but with touring he could come close to making double that figure.

On 18 October 1993 a 41-date tour of US arena-size venues – the longest ever Nirvana tour – kicked off at the Arizona State Fair in Phoenix. It was the first time Nirvana had played an arena tour, and they had augmented their sound accordingly. Brought in on guitar was Pat Smear, who in 1976 had started the Germs, releasing 'Forming/Sexboy' in 1977, considered the first LA punk record. Mixed race, Pat had great positive energy, and was very funny. Also onstage with the band was cellist Lori Goldston, a

classically trained musician from Seattle.

During the tour there was increasing distance not only between Kurt and the rest of the band, but evidently also between Kurt and the accompanying Courtney. Kurt hated the celebrity world of which she seemed increasingly enamoured. There was also a rift with his management, especially with John Silva, who now referred to Kurt as 'the junkie'. Two tour buses were used – one for Kurt and Pat Smear – which also meant Courtney, and one for the rest of the group. Kurt was drinking little on this tour. But others noted how isolated he seemed.

On 21 October, the *In Utero* tour reached Kansas City. Kurt was driven over to meet his hero and fellow junkie William S. Burroughs, who lived in nearby Lawrence. Afterwards, Burroughs said the subject of drugs never came up once. He spent much of their time together extolling to Kurt the virtues of Leadbelly, the blues legend.

At Inglewood Forum on 30 December 1993, as Krist started singing the Kinks' 'You Really Got Me', Kurt left the stage and returned with a drill, which he drove into his guitar before picking it up and spinning it over his head with the drill still attached. Meanwhile, 'big hair' rocker Eddie van Halen turned up drunk backstage, wanting to join them in their set on guitar. 'No, you can't,' said Kurt.

The next day, New Year's Eve, Nirvana were shown on an MTV special, *Live and Loud*. Also on the bill were Pearl Jam, the Breeders and Cypress Hill. The show had been pre-recorded on 13 December at Pier 48 in Seattle, a ferry terminal. It was an event riven by tensions, with Kurt seeming out of it – as did many people in the audience and backstage. Meanwhile, in real time on New Year's Eve, Nirvana were playing the Oakland Coliseum Arena.

After dates in Vancouver, the *In Utero* tour wound up on 7 and 8 January at Seattle's Center Arena. This would be the last time Nirvana played in the United States.

They would soon be on the road again. The *In Utero* tour was heading for Europe, with thirty-eight shows in sixteen countries. The Lollapalooza travelling US festival had made an offer to Nirvana of $7 million to headline that summer's shows. Everyone involved felt they couldn't refuse, except for Kurt. Despite his objections, Lollapalooza was placed on Nirvana's schedule for that summer.

By now work had been completed on the house he and Courtney had bought at 171 Lake Washington Boulevard in the Denny-Blaine district of Seattle (a neighbour was REM's Peter Buck); although the house was scarcely furnished, they moved in; bewildered by the size of his new five-bedroom home, Kurt created a space for himself in the walk-in wardrobe room off the main bedroom; he also became fond of hanging out in a conservatory over the garage at the rear of the property.

During January Courtney was touring overseas with Hole: just as well as Kurt's drug use – heroin and cocaine now – had created a distance between him and his wife. Ostensibly living on his own at the house, during the month off before the European tour started, Kurt spent much of the time on Aurora Avenue, doing heroin[46].

But from 28 to 30 January Nirvana returned to the recording studio, for what would be their final time recording together. Kurt did not bother to show up on the first two days, arriving late on the third day. The only completed tune that emerged from the sessions was 'You Know You're Right', with lyrics that were a pointed attack on what he considered to be the misery of his life with Courtney. 'I have never failed to fail', the final line, were words that seemed like an acute summation of Kurt Cobain's low self-esteem. That this was the last line Kurt Cobain would ever put down on tape imbues them with an extraordinary resonance.

Nirvana flew to Paris on 2 February 1994 for an appearance on a French television show. The tour proper opened in Cascais in the Portugese Algarve on 6 February. The opening act for the first shows were the re-formed Buzzcocks, stalwarts of 1976 Manchester punk rock, a personal choice of Kurt.

Following a date in Madrid, the tour's second night, Kurt called Courtney, in tears. She was in Los Angeles, staying at the Chateau Marmont, the epitome of LA decadence. Although friends would assure

him that it was not the case, there were rumours that Courtney had resumed her fling with Billy Corgan, and also that she had been seeing Evan Dando of the Lemonheads. An intended stay of two days at the Chateau turned into weeks, and Courtney was three weeks late when she arrived in London, supposedly to join the *In Utero* tour. On arriving, she was meant to immediately board a flight to Rome, but Courtney decided instead to spend time in the English capital.

In mid-February, the tour was in Paris. Kurt did a photo session for a French magazine: one of the shots was of Kurt with the barrel of a rifle in his mouth.

Seven days later, Kurt Cobain turned twenty-seven. He spent the day depressed, as he had been throughout the tour.

After the second of two nights in Milan, he told Krist that he wanted to cancel the rest of the dates. As the next show was in Ljubljana in Slovenia, and relatives would be travelling there from neighbouring Croatia, Krist demurred. Kurt agreed to carry on.

On 1 March in Munich before the final show of that leg of the tour – a further pair of German dates would be cancelled – Kurt spoke on the phone to Courtney. The ensuing row drove him to phone his lawyer to say he wanted to initiate divorce proceedings. Deeply pained, Kurt was aware that this would set in motion for Frances precisely the trauma he had undergone as a child and from which he had never recovered.

Kurt was also ill, suffering from bronchitis and severe laryngitis. After the Munich gig, he and Pat Smear flew to Rome, Kurt checking in to room 541 at the swish Excelsior Hotel. Courtney, due to arrive with Frances, was late.

When she finally made it to Rome, Courtney discovered that Kurt had filled their room with red roses. He was making a big effort. Immediately he ordered champagne from room service, telling his wife how much he had missed her. Courtney's response was to take sleeping tablets and go to bed. Kurt was distressed.

That night Kurt took an overdose of sixty Rohypnol tablets. When Courtney woke at around 6 a.m. she found her husband lying on the floor, blood seeping from his nose. In his hand, on hotel stationery, was a three-page note to Courtney. He had written that she no longer loved him, and was unable to cope with the pain of 'another' divorce. Courtney later burned the note.

Taken by ambulance to the Umberto 1 Polyclinic Hospital, Kurt had his stomach pumped out, and was put on a life-support machine. But he only fell deeper into unconsciousness.

CNN mistakenly announced his death. His management company released a statement saying that Kurt had 'inadvertently overdosed on a mixture of prescription medicine and alcohol, while suffering from severe influenza and fatigue.' Few were fooled.

The next day, 5 March, twenty hours after he had fallen unconscious, Kurt awoke, and wrote a note: 'Get this fucking catheter out.'

On the flight back to Seattle on 12 March, a day after the second leg of the *In Utero* European tour should have commenced, Kurt could be overheard by fellow passengers loudly demanding a Rohypnol from Courtney. She said she no longer had them.

Back at home in Seattle, there was palpable hostility between Kurt and Courtney. Kurt locked himself away in his bedroom, surrounded by guns. On 18 March, Courtney called the police, telling them Kurt's behaviour was suicidal. Kurt responded by saying he had locked himself in his room to keep Courtney away. The police took away Kurt's weapons: a Colt AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, a Beretta .380 and a pair of Taurus handguns, along with twenty-five boxes of ammunition and a bottle of unidentified pills.

On 18 March, furious at Courtney for her ceaseless haranguing of him over his drug usage, Kurt walked out of the house. There was evidence of serious hypocrisy on Courtney's part: 'On one line Kurt rang me to get some speed,' recalled Dylan Carlson of this period, 'and the other line goes and it's

Courtney wanting me to get her some dope. And neither wants the other to know.'[47]

Kurt and Dylan Carlson now disappeared for several days, heading for Aurora Avenue, and the Marco Polo motel. There, Kurt OD'd on heroin, another friend saving his life by walking him round the room. They also spent nights at the nearby Crest and the Seattle Inn. Kurt hung out in such Seattle bars as the new and hip Linda's Tavern on East Pine Street in Capitol Hill, and at friends' apartments.

After what had happened in Rome, Kurt seemed a changed man. Dylan, and also Krist, worried that his brain might have been affected. Dylan told Charles Cross that 'after Rome, he seemed monochromatic.'[48]

Behaving like a teenage runaway, his time away from home that March allowed Kurt a measure of relatively anonymous freedom, a chance to become who he used to be. But there was a financial problem. On the second day, Courtney managed to persuade his bank to cancel her husband's credit cards.

Kurt called Krist Novoselic, and his old friend came over to see him. Krist wanted to take Kurt up to a cabin in the country, where he could withdraw from drugs. But first they needed something to eat. Although Krist suggested an upscale eaterie, Kurt insisted on going to a specific Jack in the Box. When Krist realized that the fast-food restaurant was located next to the apartment of Kurt's dealer, he was furious. They had a stand-up row, and Kurt disappeared and went home.

But there a plot was afoot. An intervention had been planned for 21 March, which Kurt learned of after Krist spilt the beans. Instead, it was moved to 25 March. When it took place, Kurt was smacked up. It doesn't appear to have been a very rational encounter, with Courtney threatening Kurt that if he didn't stop doing drugs, she would divorce him, and his access to Frances would be limited.[49] Eventually, Courtney left the house for a flight to LA, where she herself was to undergo drug therapy, as she had promised during the intervention. She never saw Kurt again.

The next day Kurt overdosed once more while sitting in his parked car, after visiting junkie friends. On realizing the state he was in, they had made him leave, terrified he would die there. He eventually he came to, in even greater emotional pain than ever.

Kurt agreed to treatment. On 29 March Krist, trying to help his old buddy, came to take Kurt to Sea-Tac airport for a flight to Los Angeles, where he was scheduled to enter the Exodus Recovery Centre. But Kurt had had second thoughts. After trying to get out of Krist's car on the I-5, he then hit his bass player in the face. The last a sobbing Krist, Kurt Cobain's closest friend, saw of him was as he ran manically away through the airport.

The next day Kurt decided to submit to the programme. Before going, he persuaded Dylan Carlson to use his name to purchase a gun – in case of prowlers, he said. Together they bought a Remington M-11 twenty-gauge shotgun and shells. Kurt also did as much heroin as he could manage during the day. That night he flew to Los Angeles.

At Exodus he was not placed in the locked-down psychiatric unit. Had the facility known of the truth about the Rome overdose, he would have been.

Another patient at Exodus, one from Kurt's world, was Gibby Haynes of the Butthole Surfers. He and Kurt would spend time together, smoking cigarettes in the garden, joking about the guy who broke out by climbing over the rear wall – even though the front gates were never locked. On Friday 1 April, Kurt seemed truly happy, almost ecstatic. When Frances briefly visited him, brought by a friend, he was all over her, tossing her up in the air and making her laugh, holding her closely and tenderly whispering in her ear. His thinking was clear, and there was almost a glow about him.[50]

Late that afternoon he spoke to Courtney. 'Just remember, no matter what, I love you,' he told her, and put down the phone.

At 7.25 that evening, Kurt Cobain climbed over the rear wall, the same act of stupidity he and Gibby had joked about. Three hours later, he was taking off from LAX to Seattle. His credit cards reinstated, he had been able to buy a first-class ticket. Sitting next to him on the plane was Duff McKagan, the bassist

with Guns N' Roses. The two musicians had a secret link: Duff McKagan was also an addict, though he was making active efforts to come off drugs. For most of the two-and-a-quarter hour flight, they talked and drank. 'And he was pretty down,' the bass-player thought. But there was not one mention made of 'heroine'.

At Sea-Tac, Duff met his driver and thought they should give Kurt a lift, maybe take him back to Duff's place and try and cheer him up. When he turned round to suggest this, Kurt had vanished.

At 1.45 a.m. Kurt reached home. The oil-fired central heating in the house had run out of fuel.

At around 7.30 in the morning, Kurt called a cab. He told the driver he needed to buy bullets. Nowhere was yet open downtown. Kurt got the driver to drop him off on seedy Aurora Avenue, where it is thought he checked into either the Crest or Quest Motel. Nearby was a drug connection, and at one point Kurt was seen at a Jack in the Box restaurant.

On Sunday, 3 April, Kurt went for supper at the Cactus restaurant in Seattle. He was with a woman, who may have been his heroin dealer, and a man. Kurt began his meal with banana pudding sautéed in brown sugar and rum, junkie food. His credit card was declined. Again, Courtney had stopped his flow of his own money. Writing out a cheque clearly caused him some difficulty: he wrote the amount where the name of the payee should be. Again he was seen at Linda's Tavern, an etiolated, spectral figure drifting through.

Kurt Cobain was not seen alive again.

*

Kurt's suicide note, found in the conservatory in which he shot himself, at the rear of the house on 5 April 1994, was written 'To Boddah', his imaginary childhood friend.

He had worked hard on his final statement. 'There's good in all of us,' part of it reads, 'and I think I simply love people too much, so much that it makes me feel too fucking sad. The sad little sensitive, unappreciative, Pisces, Jesus man. Why don't you just enjoy it? I don't know! I have a goddess of a wife who sweats ambition and empathy and a daughter who reminds me too much of what I used to be, full of love and joy, kissing every person she meets because everyone is good and will do her no harm. And that terrifies me to the point where I can barely function. I can't stand the thought of Frances becoming the miserable, self-destructive, death rocker that I've become. I have it good, very good, and I'm grateful, but since the age of seven, I've become hateful towards all humans in general. Only because it seems so easy for people to get along and have empathy. Only because I love and feel sorry for people too much, I guess. Thank you all from the pit of my burning, nauseous stomach for your letters and concern during the past years. I'm too much of an erratic, moody, baby! I don't have the passion anymore, and so remember, it's better to burn out then to fade away.

Peace, Love, Empathy. Kurt Cobain.'

[ends]

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[1] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[2] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[3] Azerrad, page 17

[4] Azerrad, page 21

[5] Azerrad, ibid.

[6] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[7] Azerrad, page 23

[8] Cross, page 51

[9] Azerrad, page 26

[10] True, page 20

[11] Azerrad, page 31

[12] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[13] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[14] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[15] True, page 29

[16] Azerrad, page 41

[17] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[18] True, page 31

[19] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[20] True, page 71

[21] True, page 71

[22] True, page 103

[23] Azerrad, page 59

[24] True, page 72

[25] True, ibid

[26] True, page 77

[27] Cross, page 285

[28] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[29] True, page 100

[30] True, page 123

[31] Cross, page 142

[32] Cross, page 157

[33] Azerrad, page 170

[34] Azerrad, page 179

[35] Azerrad, page 193

[36] Cross, page 202

[37] Journals, page 207

[38] Savage interview tapes, courtesy Jon Savage

[39] www.featureshoot.com/2009/01/michael-lavine-new-york/

[40] Cross, page 225

[41] Cross, page 229

[42] Cross, page 249

[43] Cross, page 268

[44] Cross, page 276

[45] Cross, ibid

[46] Cross, page 303

[47]Last Days of Kurt Cobain TV show

[48] True, page 552

[49] True, page 557

[50] Cross, page 329